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1

Totalitarianism: An Empty Category with Roots in Western Marxism[1]

Carlos L. Garrido[2]

Western Marxism is marked by its rejection of the Soviet Union and other socialist and anti-colonial projects that arose in the 20th century as viable and real alternatives to Western capitalism. In many different ways, various Western Marxists would postulate theses about the Soviet Union, for instance, being not substantially different from the Western Imperialist states. While it is certainly true that all the Western Marxists were critical of capitalism, often in genuinely insightful and brilliant forms, they were never satisfied with the real

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1. This is a chapter of the author's forthcoming book, Domenico Losurdo and the Marxist-Leninist Critique of Western Marxism.

2. Carlos L. Garrido is a Cuban American philosophy professor. He is the Director of the Midwestern Marx Institute and the Secretary of Education of the American Communist Party. He has authored many books, including *The Purity Fetish and the Crisis of Western Marxism (2023)*, *Why We Need American Marxism (2024)*, *Marxism and the Dialectical Materialist Worldview (2022)*, and the forthcoming *On Losurdo's Western Marxism (2025)* and *Hegel, Marxism, and Dialectics (2025)*. He has written for dozens of scholarly and popular publications around the world and runs various live-broadcast shows for the Midwestern Marx Institute YouTube. Subscribe to his Substack: *Philosophy in Crisis*.

global alternatives that arose to the ruling capitalist order. As I have discussed in some of my work,[3] this was often (although not necessarily always) due to a purity fetish, to the fact that, since these states did not live up to the pure, utopian vision that they held as the only true alternative, they would be condemned as *not actually socialism*.

Often, it wasn't simply enough to argue that the socialist states were not actually socialist. For instance, a figure like Lukács, who both traditions try to lay claim over, was clear that he was "always of the opinion that one can live better under the worst form of socialism than under the best form of capitalism."[4] This, of course, implies that while the socialist state might not be living up to the best form of socialism, it would still be something qualitatively different and better than capitalism. Insofar as one considers socialist states, faulty though they were, as something fundamentally different than the capitalist ones, the assessment of their superiority, even in imperfection, is possible. In most Western Marxists proper, Lukács's attitude is absent. For the classic authors of the tradition, the socialist projects of the 20th century were essentially no different than capitalism, and when they were considered different, it was not as *better* (like Lukács), but as worse. Central to this operation was the category of totalitarianism, developed out of Western Marxism itself (well before it appears in a figure like Hannah Arendt), and used to equate states like the Soviet Union to the most monstrous of bourgeois states – the Nazis in Germany.

Trotskyism

The Western Marxist equating of the Soviet Union and Stalin with the Nazis and Hitler would start with the individual that "eminently represented Western Marxism" within the Bolshevik revolution – Leon Trotsky.[5] As Trotsky would write in *The Revolution Betrayed*,

> *In its intermediary and regulating function, its concern to maintain social ranks, and its exploitation of the State apparatus for personal goals, the*

3. Carlos L. Garrido, *The Purity Fetish and the Crisis of Western Marxism* (Dubuque: Midwestern Marx Publishing Press, 2023).

4. Eörsi, István, and Jeffrey Davis. "Georg Lukács and Gelebtes Denken: The Right to the Last Word." *New German Critique*, no. 23, 1981, pp. 115–29. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/487943. Accessed 22 Feb. 2025.

5. Domenico Losurdo, *Western Marxism: How It Was Born, How It Died, How It Can Be Reborn*, trans Steven Colatrella and George de Stefano (New York: Monthly Review, 2020), 68.

> *Soviet bureaucracy is similar to every other bureaucracy,* especially the fascist.[6]

Trotsky would add, in the same text, that "Stalinism and fascism, in spite of a deep difference in social foundation, are symmetrical phenomena. In many of their features they show a deadly similarity… As in the fascist countries, from which Stalin's political apparatus does not differ save in more unbridled savagery ..."[7] These comments are made three years after Hitler's rise to power in Germany, right at the start of the popular front against fascism. It is at this time, where various forces are uniting to fight against the sanguine fascist regimes in Europe, that Trotsky decides to draw out homologies between Stalin and Hitler, and the "degenerated workers state" and Nazi Germany. The British Trotskyist and leader of the Socialist Workers Party of Great Brittain, Duncan Hallas, would write that "It is interesting that Trotsky at this time should draw attention to the similarities between fascism and Stalinism, when the Popular Front was still at its height."[8] At a time when the Soviet were seeking unity to destroy the Nazi menace, this "communist" leader was downplaying the Soviets to such an extent that comparisons with the Nazis themselves were in order.

It was far from being just Trotsky who was drawing these connections. The whole network of Trotskyism was, often in various forms, coming up with different theses to draw out a common foundation between the genocidal projects of European fascism, and the workers and peasants state in the Soviet Union. In 1933, for instance, the Trotskyite Victor Serge would write that the Soviet Union was a "totalitarian, caste-ridden, absolute, power-mad State that does not care about human beings."[9] Sometimes they would go as far as to say that the Soviet Union wasn't just similar to the Nazis in being authoritarian, but that *fascism itself* was taking hold of the Soviet Union. Serge, writing in his text, From Lenin to Stalin, argued that Stalin was moving "toward establishing the advent of fascism in the U.S.S.R."[10] If such is true, clearly, for the

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6. Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?* (London: New Park, 1967), 248.

7. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, 278. Trotsky, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, In *Documents of the Fourth International* (New York: Pathfinder Press 1973), 213.

8. Duncan Hallas, *Trotsky's Marxism* ((London: Pluto Press, 1979), 31.

9. Letter from Serge to his friends, under the title "Victor Serge is Deported", In *The Masses*, No. 8, p. 17, July-August 1933. Cited in https://libcom.org/library/victor-serge-totalitarianism-state-capitalism-philippe-bourrinet?utm_source=chatgpt.com

10. Victor Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1937), 85.

Trotskyites, there was no dog to bet on in the second World War, since both sides are little different from each other.

These positions, of course, would be intensified when the Soviets were forced to buy time with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. As Trotsky wrote at the time, "the Stalinist bureaucracy has demonstrated that it is ready to go to the end along the road of friendship with Hitler, in order to crush the socialist revolution."[11] In another text, he adds: "I said it many times in the last years and I repeat it again. The German-Soviet Pact is a capitulation of Stalin before fascist imperialism with the end of preserving the Soviet oligarchy… Moscow… is helping Hitler."[12] It is impressive, for a man who once led the Red Army on the battlefield, that not the slightest awareness of tactic could be found in his assessment of the tactical importance of the pact to buy time and space for the defense of the Soviet project from the eventual Hitlerite assault. The same, of course, was true of his followers. As Losurdo notes, after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the "indignation" amongst the "white activists" of Trotsky's fourth international "knew no limits."[13] For Trotsky and his crew, "the two countries that had signed the villainous pact must be put on the same level."[14]

For the East this pact brought no indignation, it was seen – as what it was in reality – as a tactical move by the Soviets to buy time, and ultimately, defeat the Nazi invasion as they did. As Losurdo writes in his book on Stalin,

> *Thus emerges the danger of an invasion and war on two fronts: It's only at this moment that Moscow begins moving toward a pact of non-aggression with Germany, noting the failure of the popular front strategy… Did Stalin count on the long or eternal duration of the pact? In truth, from the start he is aware of the inevitability of the clash with Nazi Germany: 'we will be spared from the war for a little while longer'… The mutual distrust between the Soviet Union and the Third Reich and the preparation for*

11. Leon Trotsky, "The USSR in War (1939)," *In Defense of Marxism* (New York 1942).Cited from *Marxist Internet Archive*: https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1939/09/ussr-war.htm

12. Leon Trotsky, "Statement to Press on Soviet-German Alliance," *Socialist Appeal*, Vol. III No. 67, 9 September 1939, 1 & 4. Cited from *Marxist Internet Archive*: https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1939/09/statement.htm

13. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 89.

14. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 89.

> *open conflict never ceased, not even during the months following the non-aggression pact.*[15]

Had this been a capitulation to Nazism and imperialism by a Soviet state moving closer and closer to fascism (as the Trotskyites thought), would there have been any sense in developing militarily for a great war against Hitler? If the plan was to 'buddy up' with Hitler, given their common "totalitarian" foundation, why was Stalin so obsessed with developing the military capacities of the state to be able to defend from a Hitlerite attack? Even Isaac Deutscher, who was indubitably sympathetic with Trotsky and a critic of "Stalinism," commented on the completely baseless character of the accusation, levied in Khruschev's so-called "Secret Speech," of Stalin's unpreparedness for the war, of his trust in Hitler's pact.[16] Instead, the following is what the evidence suggests:

> *Documents from the Russian archives demonstrate that, at least during the two years before the Third Reich's aggression, Stalin was literally obsessed with the problem of the 'quantitative increase' and the 'qualitative improvement of the entire military apparatus.' Some data speaks for itself: while in the first five-year plan the defense budget reached 5.4% of total state spending, in 1941 the military budget increased to 43.4% of spending; 'In September of 1939, by order of Stalin, the Politburo made the decision to construct in the year of 1941 nine new factories for the production of planes.' By the time of the Nazi invasion, Soviet 'industry had produced 2,700 modern planes and 4,300 armored cars.' Judging by this data, we can say that the USSR arrived anything but unprepared for the tragic confrontation.*[17]

The East, in addition, recognized the continuity of barbarism between the imperialism of the so-called liberal democracies and the Nazi state. As was the case with the First World War, for the East it is impossible to see the timeline of the Second World War starting in 1939. How can, for instance, the Chinese take 1939 as the starting point when in 1937 we see the Japanese imperialist

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15. Domenico Losurdo, *Stalin: History and Critique of a Black Legend* (US: Iskra Books, 2023), 162, 165, 164.

16. Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), viii.

17. Losurdo, *Stalin*, 162.

"rape of Nanking," where anywhere from 200 to 300 thousand people are massacred? How can anyone who knows about the Spanish Civil War, where fascist Italy and Germany would intervene – along with the Western "liberal democracies" – to support Franco's fascist forces, claim that the Second World War started half a decade after?

But the Western Marxists, on the contrary, held that both states "personified the horror of 'totalitarianism.' "[18] With that, one of the favorite abstract categories of Western Marxism and the Western Left in general would be introduced. It is a category that is fundamentally unable to see the difference in the concrete character of state repression. They forget what Robespierre had long ago taught us:

> *It has been said that terror is the principle of despotic government. Does your government therefore resemble despotism? Yes, as the sword that gleams in the hands of the heroes of liberty resembles that with which the henchmen of tyranny are armed. Let the despot govern by terror his brutalized subjects; he is right, as a despot. Subdue by terror the enemies of liberty, and you will be right, as founders of the Republic. The government of the revolution is liberty's despotism against tyranny. Is force made only to protect crime? And is the thunderbolt not destined to strike the heads of the proud?*[19]

As Losurdo would note, the category of 'totalitarianism' is

> *Totally separated from the colonial question, included in its condemnation, on the one hand, the country that from the moment of its founding (in the October Revolution) had called on the "slaves of the colonies" to break their chains, and on the other the country that intended to take over and radicalize the colonialist tradition, making it work in Eastern Europe as well, and even reestablishing slavery. Influenced by this climate, Trotsky resorted to using the category "totalitarian dictatorship" and put into the genus of this category the species "Stalinist" and "Fascist" (and "Hitlerian"), a usage that would become the common sense of the Cold*

18. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 90.

19. Maximilien Robespierre, "Justification of the Use of Terror (1794)," accessed via *Marxist Internet Archive*: https://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1794/terror.htm

> *War and the dominant ideology of today. And yet, this was not enough to avoid a devastating rift in the U.S. Trotskyist party.*[20]

Even if one removes the broader usage of the term, which is usually employed synonymously with authoritarianism and a repressive state, the accusations of the Soviet Union being "totalitarian" like the Nazis makes even less sense. For the narrower definition of totalitarianism, a central component of the totalitarian state was the all-encompassing influence of the state on all public and private matters, such that any semblance of autonomy by individuals and collectives outside of this top-down structure is non-existent or extremely faint. Rights, economic, civil, political, cultural, are virtually nil. Only what the upper echelons of the state, the Fuhrers and El Duces henchmen say goes. But can this seriously ever describe the conditions of the Soviet Union, even under the most desperate times of Stalin's administration? Let us cite a document from 1955, from a source that would be the last to be called "Stalinist," or apologists of "Stalinist totalitarianism." Here is the Central Intelligence Agency, in a document that wasn't released until five decades after with the Freedom of Information Act, discussing in this private report what they expect from the change in Soviet Leadership:

> *Even in Stalin's time there was collective leadership. The Western idea of a dictator within the Communist setup is exaggerated. Misunderstandings on that subject are caused by lack of comprehension of the real nature and organization of the Communist power structure. Stalin, although holding wide powers, was merely the captain of a team and it seems obvious that Khrushchev will be the new captain. However, it does not appear that any of the present leaders will rise to the stature of Lenin and Stalin, so that it will be safer to assume that developments in Moscow will be along the lines of what is called collective leadership, unless Western, policies force the Soviets to streamline their power organization.*[21]

This lets us know two things. One, the idea that Stalin was a totalitarian dictator with absolute power was a myth. Stalin was subjected, like all leaders are, to the accountability of the rest of the party leadership, the lowest levels of which

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20. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 90.

21. Central Intelligence Agency, "Comments on the Change in Soviet Leadership," *Freedom of Information Act*: https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00810a006000360009-0

were elected by the Soviet people, similar to the structure that Socialist Cuba has today.

Secondly, as the second part of the passage shows, the moments where control was most readily consolidated by the highest level of leadership (still operating like a collective body and not a one-man show), were those extraordinary situations which, by the very character of the pressure externally exerted on the state, led to this consolidation. It is the same intense pressure and delicate character of party-state work which led Lenin, in *What is to Be Done*, to affirm that the party of a new type needed to be a cadre party of highly trained professional communists. This wasn't out of a desire to create an elite that could impose their will on people, but out of the dire necessities of survival. How could a party survive Tsarist repression if it didn't work, at the level of the most important decisions in leadership, with a high degree of secrecy and maneuver? And how could this be accomplished if not through a tight-knit body of professional revolutionaries? As the basic experience of a telephone game shows, in these sensitive situations the more people involved the greater room for errors, the larger the chances that operations will be compromised by the enemies. This same conjunction which led Lenin to uphold this thesis on the party would reemerge in the 1930-40s Soviet Union, where the threat of invasions and internal coup plots were immanent. Naturally, as was the case in 1904, a certain degree of operational consolidation occurs in these existential predicaments. These are not moments that are ever elevated to the level of virtues or principles, but contextually necessary for basic survival. To judge these moments as substantial to communist governance, to see them as anything but the expected effect of a high degree of pressure imposed on the state, is to commit oneself to reified thinking, to ignoring the context, the factors, that produced and shaped the existence of the fact.

In addition, central to totalitarian states, according to the narrower definition, is the complete removal of rights from the people. But was this ever the case in the Soviet state? As cited above, this shows a complete ignorance of the hierarchy of values/rights that is upheld by the Hegelian and Marxist traditions. What rights are most principally upheld are sovereignty. Even in the most repressive periods of the Soviet Union, the repression of other forms of right were rooted in the defense of what is the most important right for this new form of life – sovereignty. In the struggle against Nazism, which provides the background for the Western caricature of the Soviet state under Stalin's rule, the paradox is that, if this predicament has been read primarily by its violations of rights, from the standpoint of the new form of life, it is, on the contrary, a

demonstration of the extents that Stalin's leadership went to in order to defend the most precious right for this new form of life – sovereignty. The struggle against Nazism and the coup plots that internally correspond with it is a struggle *for* sovereignty. The Western mind (which includes the Western Marxists) only see the negative side of this, the rights that were temporarily repressed (which is, as expected, always inflated in the Western narratives). What they don't see is the rights that were defended, and the integral character of these rights for the form of life itself. When such is the case, one is able to see the utmost consistency of this leadership in an existential moment of crisis with the general principles and values of the form of life.

Beyond the defense of sovereignty, it is hard to argue, from the standpoint of the new hierarchy of values of this form of life, that the leadership that brought Russia from being an agrarian peasant society into being a global powerhouse, capable of defeating – in complete defiance to the expectations of Western "experts" – the monster of Nazism, and which then would be forced to go toe-to-toe with the U.S. empire for many decades, outdoing for decades its challenger in many significant fields, such as space exploration, education, and cybernetics, was a totalitarian state that completely undermined the rights of its people. It is only when one is operating under the bourgeois paradigm of rights, where the most principal rights are those to private property, as well as the civil rights that are hardly ever fully secured in the capitalist West itself, that one could come to the conclusion of the Soviet state being "totalitarian." Even a basic assessment of the U.N. General Assembly resolution 2200A on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights would show that not only did the Soviet Union defend all of these within its territory (often in a superior manner to the U.S.), but that it also aided countless colonized countries in the Global South to fight for them as well.

Whatever could be said, then, of Soviet (or later on, Chinese) abuses of Civil Rights (especially within the Party leadership), it is completely absurd to categorize them, on that basis, as a totalitarian state, comparable to the Nazi regime. This would be the ultimate reduction of economic, social, cultural, political, and national rights to simply civil rights. It would demonstrate a Euro and bourgeois centric understanding of rights. The category of totalitarianism, when used in this fashion, is totally meaningless. It is only a conceptual instrument of the Cold War used to whitewash the Western Capitalist-Imperialist connections with Nazi Germany (which was not only bankrolled by Western Finance Capital, but then basically reincorporated into NATO, NASA, and other U.S. and Western State Departments – as Operation

Paperclip, Operation Gladio, and the history of the Gehlen Organization demonstrates), and villainize the Soviet's by creating an artificial ground through which one could baselessly compare them with the Nazis in the service of the anti-communist crusade of the U.S. and the capitalist West.

The Frankfurt School

In the Frankfurt School this abstract equating is central. One of the early travelers of the Frankfurt School, Franz Borkenau, would pioneer one of the earliest treatises on the concept in his book, *The Totalitarian Enemy*, where he would go on to describe the Soviet Union as "red fascism" and Nazi Germany as "brown Bolshevism."[22] Likewise, for Horkheimer, for instance, "the condemnation was unconditional: in Russia, there was not socialism but 'state capitalism.' "[23] Instead of seeing a dissolving of the state into the democracy of the worker councils, Russia reaffirmed the authoritarian state. The Soviets demonstrated, Horkheimer writes, an "integral statism, or state socialism… the most consequential form of the authoritarian state."[24] No attention, of course, was paid to the fact the Nazis were on the doorsteps of the young workers state, ready to destroy the 'Judeo Bolshevik' menace. Without that so-called 'authoritarianism,' the Soviets could not have developed their productive capacities into the force that could defeat the formidable Nazi machine and save the world from fascism. This is the context where Stalin would proclaim that "We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall go under."[25] He could not have been more correct.

It wasn't just the Soviets who received condemnations from Horkheimer, the French Revolution – the culminating event of the progressive bourgeoisie in Europe, where slavery and colonialism are condemned – would be described by Horkheimer as "tending toward totalitarianism," all the while the American and British revolution, which would sustain slavery and expand colonialism, would

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22. Franz Borkenau, *The Totalitarian Enemy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), 13. The term "red fascism" was first developed by Luigi Fabbri, an Italian anarchist, in his book *La Contrarivoluzione Preventiva* (Cappelli, Bologna, 1922).

23. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 111-2.

24. Max Horkheimer, "The Authoritarian State," *Telos* 15/3 (1973): 8.

25. J. V. Stalin, "The Tasks of Business Executives," *Collected Works Vol. 13* (Moscow: Foreign Language Press, 1954), 41.

not receive the same scorn.[26] It could not be clearer that the colonial question was largely absent from his thinking, which reduced this period to a struggle between "civilized" (i.e., bourgeois imperialist) and "totalitarian" states (i.e., states which stand with the colonized and fight off imperialism).[27] It is not surprising, then, that as the genocidal war is being waged against the Vietnamese, Horkheimer would side with the 'civilized' American imperialists against the "barbarians of the East."[28] In addition, not only would the condition of apartheid and lynching that black Americans faced not lead him to bat an eye, but he would even reiterate the racist tropes that "the average negro is more afraid of other negroes… the terrorism of the Negro activists over other Negroes… is much stronger than one thinks."[29] This is just a variation of the

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26. Horkheimer, "The Authoritarian State," 7. While Losurdo does a great job at showing how the Western Marxists ignore the evils upon which the American project is premised, he also ignores the 'good' which was just as much an integral component of it. In other words, neither Losurdo nor the Western Marxists are able to see the 1776 revolution and the American project in general dialectically. They are both one-sided, reducing the whole of a contradictory process to one side or the other. This is why, as Losurdo repeats twice in his text, "the founding of the United States resembled more a counter-revolution than a revolution" (183, 215). This view completely ignores the contradictions present in the founding fathers, which objectively led the interests of some towards continued slavery and that of others towards emancipation and the founding of a state on the most universalist values humanity had ever seen. It is interesting that Losurdo, while recognizing the importance of universalism for the struggles of colonized peoples, takes up the French Revolution but lambasts the American, out of which the French itself drew inspiration and material support from some factions of the radical dissenters in the U.S. (Paine, Jefferson, etc.). Losurdo's analysis of the U.S. fails to see how the original ideals of the Declaration of Independence formed the ideological basis for the abolitionist and socialist movements which would develop shortly after the revolution. He shows himself, in the passing comments on it he makes in this text, unable to see how the rational kernel of the American revolution has been recaptured by all sorts of radicals in American history, such that the same ideals which are distorted to defend enslavement, genocide, apartheid, etc. are simultaneously used by freedom fighters to defend the abolitionist, socialist, and anti-imperialist struggles of their times. Losurdo's sentiment on American and 1776 is a stark contrast from that held by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, and leading black communists and progressives in the U.S. like W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Henry Winston, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and many others. Losurdo's view on America couldn't be more contrary to what Paul Robeson affirms at the height McCarthyism, one of the ugliest periods in our nation's history, when he says that "I am proud of the America in which I was born… and I say as an American, as Jefferson in his time stretched his hand across to meet the great heroes of the French Revolution of 1789, I stretched my hand across the continent to shake the hands of the brave Soviet people and of the new people's democracy." For a general history of the rational kernels of the American revolution and the role these play in the development of Marxism in the U.S., see my book, *Why We Need American Marxism* (Dubuque: Midwestern Marx Publishing Press, 2024). Robeson quote: "Paul Robeson Speaks! International Peace Arch (August 16th, 1953): https://tinyurl.com/2eb9974f

27. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 114

28. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 114.

29. Max Horkheimer, "La psicanalisi nell'ottica della sociologia," in *La società di transizione*, 138; Horkheimer, "La teoria critica ieri e oggi," 172, 178. Cited in Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 114.

"black on black" crime rhetoric used by the far-right to discredit the systemic roots of the poverty that leads to violence in poor communities.

Similar anti-anti-colonial and anti-communist sentiments will be shared by Adorno, a well-respected figure in the radical sectors of Western academia. The distinguished Frankfurt School philosopher held that "fascism and communism are the same," and that "there is no difference between Hitler and Stalin as to purpose and tactics."[30] As Gabriel Rockhill has argued, Adorno continued the standard Wester Marxist line that "fascism and communism are the same because they are two forms of 'totalitarianism.' "[31] Adorno, aligning himself with the abstract cosmopolitanism we discussed above, would describe the global South's focus on the national question as a "reactionary" "fascist fantasy," a "regressive [step] compared to the Kantian universal."[32] Adorno, however, is here dragging Kant down to his level of theoretical poverty. Kant cannot be blamed for Adorno's abstract cosmopolitanism when he held a much more concrete conception of humanity, affirming that: "An abstract love of humanity 'cannot fail to dissipate this inclination through its excessive generality' and risks in this way reducing itself to an empty declaration. It is a question, then, of reconciling 'global patriotism' with 'local patriotism' or with 'love of country'; whoever is authentically universalist 'in fealty to his country must have an inclination to promote the well-being of the entire world.' "[33] Kant, unlike Adorno, was already operating with a concrete universal understanding of patriotism and internationalism.

Naturally, taking such a position on the national and colonial question would organically flow into anything from apathy to antipathy for anti-colonial struggles, whether in Algeria, Vietnam, the Americas, and other places. In the midst of Nasser's Egypt's defense of the Palestinians and the region in general by attacks from the Zionist entity (showing today more and more its genocidal affinities with the Nazis) it was Nasser and the anti-colonial forces that would be described as fascist by Adorno (a somewhat standard, pro-Zionist position of the Western Marxists which reappears in Bloch, Horkheimer, and in a softer

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30. Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 268. See Adorno's FBI file: https://vault.fbi.gov/theodor-adorno/theodor-adorno-part-01-of-01/view

31. Gabriel Rockhill, "The CIA and the Frankfurt School's Anti-Communism," *The Philosophical Salon* (June 27, 2022): https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/the-cia-the-frankfurt-schools-anti-communism/

32. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 192, 201–2. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 117, 121.

33. Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 91–92. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 119.

form, Marcuse).[34] A year prior to the Mylai massacre, Adorno would write that: "in the security of America, an emigrant could endure the news of Auschwitz; it would be difficult to believe that Vietnam is robbing anyone of sleep, especially since every opponent of colonial wars must know that the Vietcong for their part use Chinese methods of torture."[35] This promulgation of the dehumanizing myths of the imperialist about colonial peoples should not surprise any of us in the West, what followers Adorno and Western Marxism in general still have are those that adhere to a 'socialism' that sounds a whole lot like the bourgeois media in its discourse on anti-imperialist struggles (one has only to see how these people perpetuate the myths about Palestine and the axis of resistance to understand that they're following in the footsteps of Adorno). These are easy conclusions to come to when one operates, as Adorno did, with a worldview thoroughly devoid of dialectical thinking (the purity fetish), which holds, in contra with the dialectical outlook, that "the whole is the false."[36] In general, socialist and anti-colonial states would be reduced to being "totalitarian," perhaps of a different form, but essentially the same in kind, as the fascist regimes. A central component of this was, as I describe elsewhere,[37] the abstract cosmopolitanism they operated with, that is, the inability to see the many different forms of nationalism that could exist, and how these could be radically different from each other.

Many in the Frankfurt School, from Adorno, to Horkheimer, to Marcuse, developed a disdain for anything that seemed like nationalism from their experience of Nazi Germany, where they were forced to flee. However, instead of seeing how fascist and bourgeois-imperialist nationalism was to blame, they considered nationalism in general as blameworthy. This fundamentally blurred the important distinction between a nationalism that is used to affirm supremacist ideas, colonize the world, and crush working people at home, and a nationalism that is rooted in uniting working and oppressed peoples to affirm a sovereign existence free from imperial domination. In essence, this is the difference between a bourgeois and a working class nationalism, or between a bourgeois and working class patriotism.

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34. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 126-7, 121-2.

35. Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York Columbia University Press, 2005), 274.

36. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (New York: Verso, 2005), 50.

37. In another chapter from the forthcoming book, *Domenico Losurdo and the Marxist-Leninist Critique of Western Marxism*.

You can't successfully attack bourgeois nationalism with an abstract internationalism. That hurts not only the struggle at home (where you disconnect yourself from the people, the essence of any revolutionary struggle) but undermines as well the ability to influence positively any change in geopolitics. Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Comintern during the period of fierce struggle against fascism, lambasted those who let the fascist lay hold and monopolize the history - progressive and otherwise - of one's country. Instead of this national nihilism, Dimitrov urged communists and social democrats to appeal to the positive and revolutionary history of their countries to win over the people and fight against the fascists. Progressive forces must present themselves as the current embodiment of the best parts of one's national past, those that are seeking to truly uphold and fulfill the most lofty and revolutionary visions and ideals of the nation's past. I will cite, at length, an important passage from the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, where Dimitrov would say the following:

> ***"****Mussolini does his utmost to make capital for himself out of the heroic figure of Garibaldi. The French fascists bring to the fore as their heroine Joan of Arc. The American fascists appeal to the traditions of the American War of Independence, the traditions of Washington and Lincoln…*
>
> *Communists who suppose that all this has nothing to do with the cause of the working class, who do nothing to enlighten the masses on the past of their people in a historically correct fashion, in a genuinely Marxist-Leninist spirit, who do nothing* to link up the present struggle with the people's revolutionary traditions and *past -- voluntarily hand over to the fascist falsifiers all that is valuable in the historical past of the nation, so that the fascists may fool the masses.*
>
> *No, Comrades,* we are concerned with every important question, not only of the present and the future, but also of the past of our own peoples… *We Communists are the* irreconcilable opponents, in principle, *of bourgeois nationalism in all its forms*. *But* we are not supporters of national nihilism*, and should never act as such…*
>
> *Comrades, proletarian internationalism must, so to speak, "acclimatize itself" in each country in order to strike deep roots in its native land.* National forms *of the proletarian class struggle and of the labor*

movement in the individual countries are in no contradiction to proletarian internationalism; on the contrary, it is precisely in these forms that the international interests of the proletariat *can be successfully defended.*

It goes without saying that it is necessary everywhere and on all occasions *to expose before the masses and prove to them concretely that the fascist bourgeoisie, on the pretext of defending general national interests, is conducting its selfish policy of oppressing and exploiting its own people, as well as robbing and enslaving other nations. But* we must not confine ourselves to this. *We must at the same time prove by the very struggle of the working class and the actions of the Communist Parties that the proletariat, in rising against every manner of bondage and national oppression, is the* only *true fighter for national freedom and the independence of the people.*

The interests of the class struggle of the proletariat against its native exploiters and oppressors are not in contradiction to the interests of a free and happy future of the nation. On the contrary, the socialist revolution will signify the salvation of the nation *and will open up to it the road to loftier heights. By the* very fact *of building at the present time its class organizations and consolidating its positions, by the very fact of defending democratic rights and liberties against fascism, by the* very fact *of fighting for the overthrow of capitalism, the working class is fighting for the future of the nation.*

The revolutionary proletariat is fighting to save the culture of the people, to liberate it from the shackles of decaying monopoly capitalism, from barbarous fascism, which is laying violent hands on it. Only *the proletarian revolution can avert the destruction of culture and raise it to its highest flowering as a truly national culture* -- national in form and socialist in content...

If we act in this spirit, if in all our mass work we prove convincingly that we are free of both national nihilism and bourgeois nationalism, then and only then shall we be able to wage a really successful struggle against the jingo demagogy of the fascists.

That is the reason why a correct and practical application of the Leninist national policy is of such paramount importance. It is unquestionably an

> essential *preliminary condition for a successful struggle against chauvinism -- this main instrument of ideological influence of the fascists upon the masses."*[38]

Dimitrov, of course, would not be alone here. This has always been the standard Marxist position. Mao Zedong famously was asked, "Can a Communist, who is an internationalist, at the same time be a patriot?" His response is clear: "We hold that he not only can be but also must be. The specific content of patriotism is determined by historical conditions. There is the 'patriotism' of the Japanese aggressors and of Hitler, and there is our patriotism."[39] Speaking in 1976, Fidel Castro would echo this sentiment: "Marxism-Leninism definitively is profoundly internationalist and at the same time profoundly patriotic. In our concept, liberation, progress and peace in the fatherland are indissolubly united to liberation, progress and peace of all mankind."[40] When addressing a group of American student radicals who did not want to sit next to their own flag, Fidel would tell them the following: "The US flag is your flag, you cannot allow the US ruling class to own the flag. The working class of the US must fight for the flag and once socialism is established it is up to the workers to decide what they want to do with the flag and the US as it exists."[41] This should be simple enough to understand by minds as bright as Adorno and Horkheimer's. Just because someone is allergic to apples, for instance, doesn't mean they can't eat other fruits. Likewise, just because it was the criminal Nazi regime that destroyed their homes and made them flee, doesn't mean that nationalism couldn't be used towards completely contrary ends.

There is a great scene from *Ernst Thälmann - Führer seiner Klasse* (1955), where the Soviet tanks are marching in on Germany. The tanks have flags with Thälmann's (the legendary communist leader) face on them. A German communist soldier, speaking to the capture Nazi, is asked: "you said you were German. But why are you fighting your country?" His reply is excellent: "You're wrong. I'm fighting Hitler. Not Germany. For Thälmann's ideas,

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38. Georgi Dimitrov, *The United Front: The Struggle Against Fascism and War* (London: Lawrence
and Wishart, 1938), 61-64.

39. Mao Tse-Tung, "Patriotism and Internationalism," *Selected Works Vol. 2* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965), 196.

40. Fidel Castro, "Inaugural Session of the Cuban National Assembly: 12/02/1976," *LANIC* http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1976/19761202.html

41. This was a story told to me by Dr. Thomas Riggins, retired philosophy professor from the New School and CUNY, who was a member of the old Communist Party for his whole life.

against Hitler. We must save Germany."[42] Here, clearly, it is his socialist, working class patriotism that animates his struggle against the Nazi death machine. It is the content of patriotism that ultimately matters, not the patriotism itself. This difference, between real patriotism and superpatriotism, as Michael Parenti would put it, is lost on the Frankfurt School thinkers.[43] Therefore, a lot of them end up in the hurtful national nihilism Dimitrov referenced above. A much sharper, dialectical analysis on this issue is given by William Z. Foster, the former leader of the Communist Party USA, who was also an astute historian of American history:

> *On their own part, the progressive forces in the mass organizations have made considerable appeal to American patriotism and traditions for constructive ends. But this appeal has usually been weak, spasmodic, and ineffective. The workers, farmers, professionals, have not understood how to bring forth in their agitation the basically constructive role they have played historically in building American democracy.*
>
> *In this respect the revolutionary movement has been especially weak. From the foundation of the Socialist Labor Party in the 1870's, down through the life of the Socialist Party and the IWW, and during the early years of the Communist Party, there was a dominant tendency to ignore and to scorn American tradition and love of country. This arose out of a narrow, sectarian conception of internationalism, and it did much to weaken the position of the revolutionaries in the organizations of the patriotically minded toiling masses. Here again, a better study of Marx and Lenin would have prevented this grievous error. Only during the past few years, notably since the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International and through the writings of Comrade Browder, is real progress being made by our Party in correcting this costly mistake and in basing itself upon a correct Leninist line.*
>
> *The cultivation of the democratic, revolutionary American traditions among the mass organizations is one of the most important tasks in the building of the democratic front. We must not permit the reactionaries to steal and distort the national traditions and aspirations of the people. The great democratic masses must be taught by constant reference to American history that it was their struggles in the past that built our*

42. Ernst Thälmann - Führer seiner Klasse (english subtitles): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XixkSzKyb6I&t=0s

43. Michael Parenti, *Superpatriotism* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2004).

> *republic, that the democratic front movement of today is the continuation of all the fights for liberty in the history of our own country; that in the achievement of the current demands of the masses lies the fruition of all that is progressive and glorious in American history; that socialism is the climax toward which the entire historic struggle of the democratic American people inevitably tends.*[44]

For the U.S., the attitude that the great Renaissance man Paul Robeson had, should be noted. We must recall his words as he was being tried by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1956: "Jefferson could be sitting here, and Frederick Douglass could be sitting here, and Eugene Debs could be here."[45] And when he was asked about the patriotism of his friend, Ben Davis, a Communist Party leader and New York City councilmen, he said "I say that he is as patriotic an American as there can be, and you gentlemen belong with the Alien and Sedition Acts, and you are the nonpatriots, and you are the un-Americans, and you ought to be ashamed of yourselves."[46]

While Herbert Marcuse was a half-step up from Adorno and Horkheimer's condemnations of communism and anti-colonial movements in the global south and Middle East, he was still working within an outlook deeply embedded within the same assumptions (what I describe as the purity fetish below). At the height of the Vietnam War, Marcuse correctly asserted that "Vietnam is in no way just one more foreign policy event but rather connected with the essence of the system."[47] Additionally, he was able to connect the US' invasion of Vietnam to its treatment of its black population at home and argued for the need to connect anti-colonial struggles (such as Vietnam's) to the struggles within the metropole. Nonetheless, although supportive of the Vietnamese people's struggles, he would still argue that their fight – led by Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Party of Vietnam – had "nothing to do with building a socialist society."[48] Because it failed to live up to his 'pure' idea of what socialism ought to be like, what they were constructing was *not actually socialism*.

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44. William Z. Foster, "Secondary Aspects of Mass Organization," *The Communist*, August 1939, 703-4.

45. Paul Robeson, "Testimony of Paul Robeson before the House Committee on Un-American Activities,
June 12, 1956," *History Matters* https://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6440/

46. Robeson, "Testimony."

47. Herbert Marcuse, *Five Lectures* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 17.

48. Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, 98.

A similar half-step up is seen in his treatment of the Soviet Union. While he recognizes the difficulties presented for the construction of socialism in backward conditions and under constant imperialist attacks, he nonetheless condemns this socialist construction as totalitarian and qualitatively indistinguishable from the capitalist mode of life. Marcuse understood that in this context, the Soviet Union was necessarily on the defensive, and needed to focus first on the centralized development of the forces of production, science, and technologies. The Soviets needed, as Lenin noted shortly after the conquest of power, to develop an efficient state that could protect the revolution and country's sovereignty and lift the people's standards of living in the process. Forced to choose between "capitulating to colonialism and imperialism, or accelerating economic and technological development," Marcuse argues the Soviet Union needed "power of total administration [so that] automation [could] proceed more rapidly once a certain technical level has been attained."[49] Only in doing so would it successfully defend itself from the imperialist challenge.

Nonetheless, while recognizing this, Marcuse still condemned Soviet 'totalitarianism' in similar unsubstantiated ways as can be found in Adorno and Horkheimer. However, unlike Adorno and Horkheimer, Marcuse's condemnation is far more troublesome, since he recognizes how the Soviet Union is put on the defensive and limited by Western imperialism, yet he condemns them for doing precisely what he himself understands they were forced to do. The purity fetish here couldn't be any more apparent: because the Soviet Union failed to live up to Marcuse's 'pure' socialism, it is condemned and held to be no different – in substance – from the capitalist mode of life. It is thanks to the purity fetish and his "inability to carry dialectical thinking onto his analysis of the socialist camp" that Marcuse is able to posit the thesis of a global "one-dimensional reality."[50] The socialist 'camp,' because it was forced to desecrate its purity to protect its revolution, was now – for Marcuse – insufficiently different from the capitalist-imperialist world, and hence, not an alternative to the global system, but one component, or a form, of it. This is hardly different, for instance, from Horkheimer's condemnation of the USSR as "state capitalism" (again, in the derogatory, non-Leninist sense).[51] In both

49. Domenico Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 90. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 41.

50. Carlos L. Garrido, "The Relevance and Failures of Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man," *Hampton Institute* (May 31, 2021): https://www.hamptonthink.org/read/the-relevance-and-failures-of-marcuses-one-dimensional-man; Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 128.

51. Horkheimer, "The Authoritarian State," 4.

cases it is argued that the socialism of the USSR is not qualitatively different from the global capitalist system – if anything, it is just a more 'authoritarian' and 'statist' form of it.

While Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* critiques the anti-dialectical character of those who pass judgments based only on reified "facts and not the factors" which led those facts into existence, he himself performs this anti-dialectical castration of facts in his equating of the socialist and capitalist camp as interdependent systems of a global "one-dimensional civilization."[52] For Marcuse to say that the socialist camp, like capitalism, "exploits the productivity of labor and capital without structural resistance, while considerably reducing working hours and augmenting the comforts of life," he must ignore the conditions, both present and historical, that allowed this fact to arise.[53]

Capitalism was able to achieve this 'comfortable' life for its working masses because it spent the last three centuries colonizing the world to ensure that the resources of foreign lands would be disposable to Western capital. This course of Western capitalist enrichment required a brutal process of enclosure and colonization (the so-called 'primitive accumulation'), creating mass pauperization (in Europe) and conquests of foreign lands wherein aboriginal peoples faced genocidal treatment and Africans enslavement. Then, in the last decade of the 19th century, when the development of capitalism reached the stage of modern imperialism, this carnage was extended in much broader dimensions, producing two World Wars, Nazism, and further massacres and genocides of colonized peoples. Capitalism, as Marx said, "comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt."[54]

The overwhelming majority of the fruits from this on-going process of expropriation and exploitation, however, are not going to the working classes of the Western nations, and the very small portion of it that does, is not because of the generosity of the capitalist class. It is true, as Lenin said (with Engels), that "a privileged upper stratum of the proletariat in the imperialist countries lives partly at the expense of hundreds of millions in the uncivilised nations."[55] It is true that the right opportunist and social chauvinist segments of the "upper stratum" of the labor movement have been "bribed out of imperialist

52. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 187, 66.
53. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 46.
54. Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I* (New York: International Publishers, 1974) 760.
55. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 23* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 107

superprofits."[56] But the key here is to note that Lenin is speaking of "the petty bourgeoisie and of a certain [upper] strata of the working class;" he is not referring to the whole working class of imperialist countries.[57] The few 'comforts' Marcuse can point to have been the result of century-long labor struggles in the US (or Europe), most frequently led by communists, socialists, and militant labor unions. Capitalism has provided no comforts for working people; it has been the organized working class which, through its struggles, has forced concessions from the capitalist class and its political puppets – concessions strategically given to prevent more radical transformations. It is absurd for him to posit, as he does in *Soviet Marxism* (a text where he thanks the anti-communist Russian Institute in Columbia University, the Russian Research Center in Harvard University, and the Rockefeller Foundation for creating the conditions for him writing it), that Lenin was too limited in his conception of the labor aristocracy – instead of it being simply the upper stratum, Marcuse holds that it constitutes the whole of the majority of the working class in advanced countries."[58]

For Marcuse, since the working class of the imperialist countries has been fully absorbed into the existing state of affairs, it is no longer a revolutionary class. This, naturally, leads to either 1) the miserable pessimism of texts like *One-Dimensional Man*, or 2) the idea that all the work must be done by the third world. In either case, his positions do not threaten the capitalist class of the imperialist core – if workers are told by the "Marxists" that they can't change capitalism because they benefit from it, then they won't fight for socialism: the ruling class, therefore, is spared. Similarly, if because of this condition, workers are told that they must wait for the third world to free itself before they can be free, then the third world is given all the weight of the global struggle for socialism – while the 'exceptional' Western "Marxists" get to just sit around with their hands in their pockets waiting for the global south to do all the work. This position is not only detrimental to the working class struggle in the imperialist core, but also for the struggles of the periphery, which would be infinitely easier if the boot of imperialist hybrid warfare were removed from their necks by socialist revolution in the imperialist core. As the ever-brilliant Henry Winston notes,

56. Lenin, *CW Vol. 23*, 107.
57. Lenin, *CW Vol. 23*, 110.
58. Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1969), 31.

> *In Marcuse's view, the working class was hopelessly reactionary and contentedly integrated into the system – the upholders, not the gravediggers, of capitalism … [This] style of attacks on Marxism-Leninism in the name of 'revolution' changes, it sometimes seems, almost as frequently as traffic lights. And these 'revolutionary' assaults – which always have as their core a challenge to the Marxist-Leninist concept of the leading role of the industrial working class – receive more than a mere passive welcome from monopoly. Monopoly subsidizes, promotes, and publicizes them through its centers of education and mass media.*[59]

Similar variations of this position are often found in the ultra-left segments of the US left – specifically in certain communist and anarchist spaces.[60] The difference is the following: instead of considering the working class as workers which have been absorbed by the niceties of the imperial core (Marcuse's position), the working class – or at least the 70 percent of it which is white – are considered to be 'settlers,' not workers. These settlers are necessary foot soldiers of the settler-colonial American project. Far from being a revolutionary class in an antagonistic relationship to capital, this relatively new ultra-leftism holds that the white proletariat is a *myth*; in reality, what exists is a 'settler' class. Although these views are far more extreme than Marcuse's, both end up in a deeply pessimistic position concerning the revolutionary potential of the working class in the imperialist core; and, in so far as the practical

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59. Henry Winston, *Class, Race and Black Liberation* (New York: International Publishers, 1977), 215.

60. The book *Settlers: The Myth of the White Proletariat*, written by the state department connected anonymous anarchist J Sakai, has been making the rounds on the communist left over the last few years. It has resurfaced at a time when the fad in radical academia and certain communist groups has been referring to the US today as a 'settler-colonial' project. The ideological leader in this regard has indubitably been Gerald Horne and his book *The Counter-Revolution of 1776,* which – in hopes of historically tracing the reactions to Obama and the roots of the Trump movement – posits that the American revolution was actually a counter-revolution to protect the institute of slavery. This 'settler colonialism' framework dismisses all previous Marxist understandings of the US Revolutionary war (more on this in the last chapter of this book) and, in so doing, provides a framework for understanding the development of US society which is completely contrary to the Marxist dialectical materialist worldview. Unable to tarry with objective contradictions, development and process, qualitative leaps which occur as a result of quantitative accumulation, and other basic dialectical laws of movement observable in nature, society, and thought, this framework ends up, like Marcuse, in a deeply pessimistic position concerning the revolutionary potential of the working class in the imperialist core. This is why, similar to Marcuse, its 'radicalism' is enjoyed and disseminated in the halls of bourgeois media, NGOs, and academia. The *1619 Project*, explicitly inspired by Horne's book, is a good example of this.

implications align with the goals of the capitalist class, both have been safely adopted by radical bourgeois media, academia, and NGO's.

Marcuse's anti-dialectical equating of the socialist and capitalist camp also ignores the fact that the socialist camp industrialized their backwards countries in a fraction of the time it took the West, without having to colonize lands, genocide natives, or enslave blacks – the heinous crimes which are the background of capitalism's development. On the contrary, the industrialization process in the socialist camp was (and is – e.g., China's Belt and Road Initiative) inextricably linked to the empowering of the peripheral subjects, whether African, Asian, Middle Eastern, or Indo-American, that had been under the boot of western colonialism and imperialism for centuries. The 'third-world' that Marcuse assigns the role of historical subjectivity (in texts like *One-Dimensional Man* and others), was in large part able to sustain autonomy because of the solidarity and aid – political, military, or economic, that it received from the socialist camp. Those who were unable to establish relations with the socialist camp (for whatever reason), often replicated – in a neo-colonial fashion – the relations they had with their metropoles. The central difference was that the dominance of the European nation was no longer explicit – it was carried out under the veil of superficial Western-style bourgeois democracies (in the former colonies) which were controlled through debt-trapping by Euro-American dominated global financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Through structural adjustment programs, the Western imperialist powers could ensure that an agenda of liberalization, austerity, privatization, and deregulation were carried out in the neo-colonies, making them fertile for Western monopoly capital to continue and expand its looting and superexploitation of these nations. These processes were broadened and intensified after the overthrow of the socialist camp, which left the countries in the third world which sustained an autonomous position (thanks to the comradely relations they established with the socialist world), to be quickly re-subjected to serve Western capital (with the exceptions of Cuba and the DPRK).

By stating that the socialist camp was unable to affect a materialization of its theory in practice, and as such, that it was not qualitatively different from capitalism (making the equating of the two possible), Marcuse effectively demonstrates his ignorance, willful or not, of both the geopolitical situation of the time and of the theory itself. Socialism in the 20th century could not create its ideal qualitatively new society while simultaneously defending its revolution from imperialist hybrid warfare coming from the largest imperial powers in the

history of humanity. It is idealist and infantile to expect the struggle for socialism to resemble the 'pure' socialist ideal in a world where the dominant form of global relations is capitalist.

Nonetheless, even Marcuse is forced to admit that the socialist camp was able to create a comfortable life for its working masses. But, contrary to what Marcuse argues, this comfort in the socialist camp cannot be equated with comfort in the capitalist camp. Not only are the conditions that led to the comfort in each fundamentally different (as just previously examined), but the comfort itself, as a *fact*, was also radically different. In terms of job security, housing, healthcare, education, childcare, and other forms of government provided social securities, the comfort in the socialist camp was significantly higher than the comfort experienced by the working masses in the welfare social democracies of Europe, and tenfold that of the comfort experienced by the working masses in the US. When you add to this the ability for political participation through worker councils and the party, the prevalent spirit of solidarity that reigned, and the general absence of racism and crime, the foolishness of the equalization is further highlighted. Nonetheless, the comparison must not only be made between the capitalist and socialist camp, but between the conditions before and after the socialist camp achieved socialism. Only in doing so can we historically contextualize the achievements of the socialist camp in terms of creating dignified and freer lives for hundreds of millions of people. For these people, Marcuse's comments are somewhere between laughable and symbolic of the usual disrespect and social chauvinism found in the purity fetish of Western Marxism.

Although Marcuse was unable to live long enough to see it, the fall of the socialist camp he eagerly equated with the imperialist West, and the subsequent 'shock therapy' that went with it, not only devastated the countries of the previous socialist camp – drastically raising the rates of poverty, crime, prostitution, and inequality, while lowering the standard of living, life expectancy, and opportunities for political participation – but also the countries of the third world and those of the capitalist camp themselves![61] With the threat of communism seemingly gone, the mass resources of the third-world (and those of the post-Soviet states) were up for grabs again, and the first world, no longer under the pressure of the alternative that a comfortable working mass in the socialist camp presented, was free to extend the wrath of capital back into

61. For more on the effects of the overthrow of the Soviet Union see: Parenti's *Blackshirts and Reds*; Carlos Martinez's *The End of the Beginning*; and Roger Keeran and Thomas Kenny's *Socialism Betrayed*.

its own national popular classes, eroding century long victories in the labor movement and creating the conditions for precarious, unregulated, and more exploitative work. This destroyed the 'middle-class' condition which a relatively large portion of the white proletariat held, it *re-proletarianized* them, as Noah Khrachvik argues.[62]

Therefore, as I have previously stated,

> *Works like* One-Dimensional Man*, which take upon the task of criticizing and equating 'both sides,' do the work of one side – capitalism – in creating a 'left' campaign of de-legitimizing socialist experiments. This process of creating a* 'left' de-legitimation *campaign is central for the legitimation of capital.*[63]

The purity fetish outlook of Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and many others from the 20th century Western Marxist tradition, embedded within what Gabriel Rockhill calls "the global theory industry," is the ideological backdrop for their function as "*radical recuperators*" – agents of what I call *controlled counter-hegemony,* which "cultivate and market the appearance of radicality in order to recuperate potentially radical elements in society, particularly young people and students, within the pro-imperialist anti-communist fold."[64] It is no coincidence that you will only find Marxist who are often more critical of socialism than capitalism within the academy and media. The hegemonic order creates, finances, and proliferates *controlled counter-hegemonic* institutions, movements, and forces that channel popular discontent into areas which fail to substantially challenge the existing order (more on this in chapter four). The Marxist authors hailed in Western academies are but the agents through which this process of controlled counter-hegemony concretizes. The concept of totalitarianism, which has been so important for the Frankfurt School lexicon and their equating of socialist states with fascism, proves to be based on an abstract thinking that is unable to tell apart working class and bourgeois nationalism, or, in another form, unable to tell the difference between the dictatorial authority exerted by a working class state against the enemies of the revolution, and that exerted by a dictatorship of capital – fascist or otherwise –

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62. Noah Khrachvik, *Reproletarianization: On the Rise and Fall of the American Middle Class* (Dubuque: Midwestern Marx Publishing Press, forthcoming 2025).

63. Garrido, "The Relevance and Failures of Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man."

64. Gabriel Rockhill, "Capitalism's Court Jester: Slavoj Žižek," *CounterPunch* (January 02, 2023): https://www.counterpunch.org/2023/01/02/capitalisms-court-jester-slavoj-zizek/

to sustain the rule of capital. In either case, it involved a mental operation whereby something is divorced from its proper context to be equated with something else which is also divorced from its context, on the basis of a superficial, formal similarity.

The concept of totalitarianism treads in the abstract understanding of democracy and dictatorship that I explore elsewhere,[65] with Lenin's reply to Kautsky. However, a few additional statements must be made here. While it is true that we can speak in terms of democracy as a universal that can take up various different forms (e.g., the slave democracies of ancient Greece, bourgeois democracy, and socialist democracy), if we critically interrogate the etymological understanding of democracy itself, it is hard not to see how only socialist democracy faithfully upholds the ideal, at least more fully than the other historical forms. Democracy, of course, consists of two central terms: Demos (people) and Kratos (rule, power, the ability to dictate one's interests upon something). It is important to note that when we translate Demos to people, an implied additional quality is removed. Demos refers, more directly, to what in Spanish we would call *pueblo*, than what in English we call people. *Pueblo* has a much more popular implication, it is the "common folk," regular working people. People of humble means, the poor. In a certain sense, what Gramsci would call the subaltern. Demos, historically, referred not just to the people in general, but to the popular masses.[66] Democracy, then, is the rule, the power, the ability to dictate, of the common people, of the popular masses. Here is a central implication that is lost on all Western Marxists: democracy contains, not externally, but within its very being, dictatorship. If the Demos does not have the ability to impose, through its power, its will on society at large, it therefore does not have the ability to rule, it does not have Kratos. Democracy, then, could not exist without dictatorship of a specific form – the dictatorship of the people. When we analyze what socialist democracy is, the dictatorship of the proletariat, we realize that it is fundamentally democracy in its originally understood sense.

Part of the problem is how our understanding of democracy has been distorted historically, when the particularities of various historical forms of democracy have elevated specific institutional forms to the level of the abstract universal of democracy itself. For instance, "democracy" in the bourgeois form of life is treated as an idea that has to do, and is even reducible, to the proceduralism of

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65. Another chapter of the forthcoming book this article is a chapter in.

66. Paul Cockshott and Allin Cottrell, *Toward a New Socialism* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1993), 157.

multiparty elections. But historically elections were considered to be an institutional form of aristocracy/oligarchy. For instance, in his *Politics*, Aristotle writes that

> *The name aristocracy is used to mark a distinction from oligarchy... it describes a constitution in which election to o□ce depends on merit and not only on wealth. But oligarchy readily passes for aristocratic since almost everywhere the rich and the well-educated upper classes are co-extensive.*[67]

Likewise, even the founders of the U.S. were critical of multi-parties and the role that they could play in factionalism and prioritizing private interests over those of the republic. In general, the proceduralism and institutional forms through which we are accustomed to thinking about democracy really have little to do with democracy itself, and have often been considered, by the earliest political philosophers on the subject, as institutional forms of aristocracy/oligarchy, not democracy. In this sense, using this framework to judge what is democratic and what isn't, would be like judging the quality of a meal on the basis solely of the amount of ingredients present. Unfortunately, often Western Marxists accept this paradigm when analyzing socialist states and labeling them "totalitarian."

Arendt, Foucault, and Levinas

Three central theorists of the Western Left, whose work would not only go unchallenged, but often incorporated in the Western Marxists, are Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and to a lesser extent, Emmanuel Levinas (and Giorgio Agamben). All of these thinkers develop the abstract category of 'totalitarianism' to equate the Communists movement (and in some even Marx) and the Nazis, in ways which often replicate the dogmas, myths, and propaganda of the Cold War warriors in the imperialist West.

Hannah Arendt, who has been compared to Rosa Luxemburg by some Western Marxists (poor Rosa), would be incredibly influential in one of the recent seminal texts in the tradition – Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*.

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67. Aristotle, *Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 1293.

Therefore, like Foucault and the others (who have a similar relation to Western Marxism) the influence of their work on the tradition should be explored.

Arendt presents a sort of quandary in her development, of the sort that resembles the frequent trot-to-neocon pipeline.[68] In her earlier years, she was a staunch critic of Western capitalist-imperialism, seeing the barbarity of Nazism as an extension of the same colonial system the West had long ago been at the helm of. "Nazism," she wrote, is "the most dreadful imperialism the world has ever known."[69] She seemed, at least early on, to recognize the centrality of racism and the dehumanization of colonial peoples for this system, which needs to uphold a "cult of race" with "superior and inferior races."[70] Racism, she wrote, was "the main ideological weapon of imperialistic politics."[71] In addition, although it might sound ludicrous to those that appreciate the old, cold war warrior Arendt, early on she would recognize the central role of the Bolshevik revolution (and the Stalin period) in fighting off this colonial system and the racism and antisemitism that has long been a central component of it. In 1948 she would come together with Albert Einstein and other great leftist intellectuals to condemn the Zionist settler colonial project as an "admixture of ultranationalism, religious mysticism, and racial superiority," marked by "terrorist violence against the civilian Arab population," and "closely akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy, and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties."[72] Those that are seeing this entity commit a genocide for almost a year right before our very eyes could not but appreciate her foresight on the similarities between the Zionist and Nazi entities.

The category of totalitarianism in the first two volumes of her work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, was primarily used to "define the nexus between Nazism and colonialism."[73] As Losurdo notes, "the first model of totalitarian power was exercised over the colonized peoples, who were dehumanized

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68. Carlos L. Garrido, "Dogmatism, Tatian the Syrian, and the Trotskyite to Neocon Pipeline," *Philosophy In Crisis* (January 15, 2025): https://carlosgarrido.substack.com/p/dogmatism-tatian-the-syrian-and-the

69. Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings* (New York: Shocken Books, 2007), 182.

70. Hannah Arendt, "Imperialism: Road to Suicide: The Political Origins and Use of Racism," 1946, in *Erstveröffentlichungen*, 255–56. Accessed via: https://www.commentary.org/articles/mortbarrgmailcom/imperialism-road-to-suicide/

71. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1973), 160.

72. Hannah Arendt, Albert Einstein, Sidney Hook, and Seymour Melman 1948/2007, "New Palestine Party Visit of Menachem Begin and Aims of Political Movement Discussed," Open Letter to the *New York Times*, December 4, in Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 417–19.

73. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*,149.

through racist ideology, decimated and enslaved."[74] A sharp turn would be made by the third volume, published in the start of the Cold War, and evident for reviewers at the time (both those favorable to the old or young Arendt). As Losurdo notes, citing various reviewers at the time:

> *The heterogeneous character of* The Origins of Totalitarianism *was grasped by other historians, who called attention to the artificial effort needed to make "Soviet Communism the totalitarian equivalent of Nazism," for example, inventing a Bolshevik pan-Slavism that would have been the counterpart of Nazi pan-Germanism. All in all, "regarding Stalinism, the book is less satisfying," and the lack of a "clear theory" of "totalitarian systems" becomes quite evident. To be more precise: "in many passages, the analysis of the Soviet Union appeared to have been mechanically made similar to that of Germany, as if it had been later inserted for symmetry's sake." Certainly, Arendt's book on totalitarianism "was actually, in the main, an explanation of the rise to power of Nazism and focused its first two sections on anti-Semitism and imperialism, themes with little relevance to the nature of Soviet power." It would be worthwhile to bid adieu to the category of "totalitarianism," which aims only to destroy the USSR through an artificial but "deadly comparison" with Hitler's Germany.*[75]

As all anti-communist warriors, Arendt's work had to distort reality to substantiate her thesis equating the USSR and the Nazis, interestingly leaving unscathed the colonialism of the Western Capitalist powers whom she previously (and correctly) saw as upholding the same system that produced the Nazis and which the Soviets challenged. Even explicitly fascists states like Mussolini's Italy, Franco's Spain, and Salazar's Portugal would not be worthy, in Arendt's eyes, of being labeled 'totalitarian,' while all the states which sought to combat the imperialist system and uplift hundreds of millions of workers and colonized peoples were.[76] This was a 180 degree turn from progressive theory and historiography to a deeply reactionary anti-communism that just spins the Cold War agenda, distorting reality to fit its mold. It was a

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74. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 149.

75. H. Stuart Hughes in A. Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 112. Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1985), 28. Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe 1914–1949* (London: Penguin, 2015), 112 and 117. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 151.

76. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 157.

downfall from genuine theory, philosophy, and history to cold-blooded imperialist propaganda used to legitimize the brutal wars of empire against anti-colonial and socialist struggles in a period that was anything but "cold." As Losurdo notes, Western Marxism largely accepted the thesis of the later Arendt, and therefore, the ideology of the Cold War warriors.

Following in the footsteps of Arendt is one of the luminaries of the Western left, Michel Foucault. Described by Gabriel Rockhill as a "opportunist and petty-bourgeois careerist," Foucault would show himself as the archetype of a "shape-shifter" in the French "left" scene, showing sympathies with the French Communist Party when it was convenient, and being a cold war warrior when it wasn't.[77] In him we find the epitome of the abstract condemnation of every power relation. As Losurdo writes,

> *The gesture of condemning every power relation, indeed every form of power in both society and in discourse about society, made problematic or even impossible the "determinate negation" (bestimmte Negation), that very negation of a "determinate content" that, for Hegel, is the precondition of a real transformation of society, the precondition of the revolution. Further, this Foucauldian effort to identify and demystify domination in all its forms reveals surprising lacunae precisely where domination manifests itself in all its brutality: attention to colonial domination is scarce or nonexistent.*[78]

Naturally, the abstract category of totalitarianism fits in perfectly with this de-contextualized understanding of power, often blind to the atrocities of the imperialist West. For instance, the idea of the "disappearance of torture as a public spectacle," so central to his *Discipline and Punishment*, ignores completely the spectacle of lynching that black people were subject to from the counterrevolution of property in 1876 to the civil rights revolution in 1964.[79] Notwithstanding his ignoring of the historic condition of black people in the U.S., Foucault's postulates the ignorant thesis that "state racism" first made its appearance in the 20th century with the rise of the Third Reich. But who did the Third Reich itself learn from? Who did the laws of Nazi Germany copy? What

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77. Gabriel Rockhill, "Foucault: The Faux Radical" *Philosophical Salon* (October 12, 2020): https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/foucault-the-faux-radical/

78. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 164.

79. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 7.

apartheid and genocidal state (and states) was Germany taking lessons from? Clearly, the answers here are the U.S. and the colonial West itself, whom Foucault completely disconnects from his esoteric history of "state racism."

If that wasn't enough, the Soviet Union, the state which founded itself telling the colonized of the world to break their chains, for Foucault, was a Stalinist "regime of state and biological racism."[80] Going beyond the previously formulated 'totalitarianism' equating of both states, for Foucault the champions of the anti-colonial, anti-racist struggle (the Soviets), are equated, not just politically, but ideologically, with the Nazi culmination of the racist colonial tradition – both as 'totalitarian' racist states. As Losurdo writes,

> *The traditional theory of totalitarianism drags in and equates more or less radically Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. But a great distance and even an ideological antithesis remain between them. The former country openly proclaimed that it was building a colonial empire founded on white and Aryan supremacy. The latter, instead, was a champion of the struggle against colonialism and racism. Foucault carried out an operation that seemed too bold even to the theorists of totalitarianism: to make Hitler and Stalin seem similar, even ideologically, as champions of "biological racism." It was an undoubtedly novel thesis, but is it supported by some evidence or arguments resembling evidence?*[81]

It is a turning of the world on its head so that the cold war hypotheses can be substantiated. Stalin, who was basically alone amongst the leaders of the allied forces in his commitment to not castrate the Germans because "the son does not answer for the crimes of the father,"[82] is in Foucault's esoteric work presented as the totalitarian dictator at the helm of a state that is guided by biological racism, where biopolitics and the "practice of death" reigns.[83] Of course, in his esoteric history of biopolitics, no mention is made of the colonial tradition which is inarguably a hundred fold times worse than the worst caricature of Stalin painted in the West. Like the rest of them, "Foucault largely ended up within the dominant ideology."[84]

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80. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 170.

81. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 170.

82. "The Liquidation of the Russian Komsomols (Y.C.L.) as a Political Organization," *New Militant*, Vol. II No. 19, 16 May 1936: https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/themilitant/1936/v02n19/komsomol.html.

83. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (New York: Picador, 1997), 254.

84. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 177.

The absurdity of the thesis which, on the basis of the abstract concept of totalitarianism, equates the Soviets with the Nazis would reach its peak of preposterousness in the work of Levinas. Levinas held that, as Losurdo writes,

> *Hitlerism negates the foundation of "liberalism," of "Western civilization," of the "Western spirit," and "the structure of thought and the truths of the Western world." It rejects the thesis of the "unconditional freedom of man before the world," of the "sovereign freedom of reason." Nazism instead counters with "the biological, with all the fatality that involves," "the mysterious voice of blood," and the idea of race. When did this perversion that seeks to question "the traditional thought of the West" begin? The answer: "Marxism, for the first time in Western history, contests this conception of man." Far from recognizing "absolute freedom, that which accomplishes miracles," Marx holds that "being determines consciousness" in such a way that he "catches European culture off guard, or, at least, he breaks the harmonious curve of its development." It is the beginning of the catastrophe that culminates in Nazism. Historical materialism paved the way for biological racism.*[85]

Marx's materialist thesis, in Levinas's eyes, is the historical predecessor and precondition for the race essentialism of the Nazis. This argument is so foolish that I wouldn't even expect YouTube channels run by high school right wingers to put it forward. And yet, here is one of the most notable "philosophers" of the Western "left" fleshing it out. I have argued before that the main critics of Marxism often foist their absence of dialectical thinking onto Marx, this couldn't be a clearer, more vulgar, example of that.[86] The whole point of Marx's materialist thesis of humanity is to reject bourgeois ahistorical essentialisms. The point is to show how the question of what it means to be human, i.e., the question of the 'human essence,' is one that is always answered historically, centered on the ensemble of social relations humans develop in. This could not be more contrary to the Nazi thesis of Aryan supremacy. Levinas quite explicitly turns the world on its head when he suggests that Marx's theses against transhistorical essentialism is a pathway towards biological race essentialism. The framework whose whole point was to reject

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85. Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, 177-8. Giorgio Agamben, "Introduzione" to Emmanuel Levinas, *Alcune riflessioni sulla filosofia dell'hitlerismo* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2012), 25–26, 32–3, 28, 29–30.

86. Carlos L. Garrido, "A Guide to Marx's Theses on Feuerbach," *World Marxist Review* 1(1) (January 2024): https://worldmarxistreview.org/index.php/wmr/article/view/6

essentialism is the one responsible for race essentialism? A more ludicrous thesis is hard to imagine.

Levinas is the culmination of a long trajectory of Western Marxist thinking which equates, on the basis of an outlook thoroughly devoid of concrete dialectical thinking, the socialist and anti-colonial states (especially the Soviets) with the Nazis on the basis of the abstract category of 'totalitarianism,' which never bats an eye for the objective barbarity of the Western capitalist-imperialist system Nazism emerged from and that communism, in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, sought to stomp out of existence.

2

Re-Proletarianization Series: Part One The Fake Left, the Middle Classes, and the Falsification of Marxism

Noah Khrachvik[1]

Note from the author:

This series of essays was originally intended as a book. However, with the rapidity of changes in society the last few years, the book has been undergoing extensive rewrites and will not be in a condition to publish any time in the near future. Its central ideas and concepts, however, are still valid in this humble

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1. Noah Khrachvik is the Secretary of Treasury for the American Communist Party and a Director for the Midwestern Marx Institute. He is the author of the forthcoming *Reproletarianization: The Rise and Fall of the American Middle Class (2025)*.

author's opinion. In regards to this, I have spoken with the editors at Red America *and come to an agreement to release them as a series of essays. My hope is that these ideas (Re-proletarianization, the American Trajectory and the three American revolutions, and the globalist stage of capitalism) will be of some value in understanding the changes happening in society today, and why the necessity of revolution seems to be quickly approaching us in the United States of America. Above that, however, I hope that they will help light the fires of that revolution in your heart, as they've been lit in mine.*

Yours in solidarity,
Noah
(Cleveland, Ohio - August, '25)

Introduction: The Crisis Without a Name

Something is wrong—profoundly wrong—and everyone knows it. The 21st century has confronted Americans with a paradox: unprecedented technological advancement alongside relentless social decay and escalating immiseration. Since the 2008 financial collapse, the veneer of stability in our fair country has cracked open, revealing a system that is cannibalizing its own foundations. Wages stagnate as productivity soars; homes stand empty while tent cities multiply; politicians perform a stage-managed, choreographed dance routine on television as living standards crumble. Everywhere you look there is debt, debt, and more debt. The pandemic laid bare the machinery of dispossession: a million dead, millions more impoverished, and a historic transfer of wealth to the oligarchs who orchestrated the disaster. Even protest, the last recourse of the desperate, seems to have been captured by the oligarchy—the largest demonstrations in U.S. history, after George Floyd's murder, yielding zero tangible results.

And the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

The symptoms are everywhere, yet the diagnosis remains elusive. Why? The ruling institutions—media, academia, the state—produce not answers but noise. They peddle obsolete economic theories, scapegoat this group or that, and reduce politics to a choice between interchangeable managerial factions. Meanwhile, the public mind, starved of coherent explanations, fractures into conspiratorial rabbit holes. Liberals blame conservatives; conservatives blame

liberals; both ignore the material architecture of their shared precarity. Social media amplifies this delirium, turning collective despair into a circus of performative rage. The result is a society that can feel its collapse but cannot think it.

This essay (the first of a series) begins with a simple premise: the crisis is not merely economic or political, but ideological. The ruling class has lost the capacity to explain—let alone resolve—the contradictions it unleashes. Financialization, the dominant logic of our age, operates as a kind of alchemy: it conjures profit from debt, speculation from decay, and money from thin air - while dissolving the very productive base it pretends to steward. Factories close, rents and housing prices soar, and wages evaporate, yet Wall Street celebrates ”growth.” The American Dream, once a narrative of collective progress, now functions as a taunt: a reminder that the future has been foreclosed and the younger generations will get nothing.

“You will own nothing and be happy.”

Sound familiar? It should. It was a slogan the World Economic Forum used.

To understand how this happened, we must first ask why existing frameworks fail. Conventional economics, trapped in positivist abstractions, cannot grasp capital’s self-devouring trajectory. Mainstream sociology reduces history to ”culture wars” and good or bad ideas, erasing class as a material force. Even critiques of neoliberalism often miss the active role of ideology—not as false consciousness, but as a structuring absence: the void where coherent thought should be. This series traces that void’s genealogy, from the post-war labor movement’s collapse to the present dystopia of globalization and financialization.

The task is urgent. When a system cannot reproduce itself without immiserating its subjects, it invites either revolution or ruin. Yet no movement can succeed without first piercing the ideological fog and explaining what’s going on.

This essay is a start.

The Abstractions of the Fake Left and the Embryo of Defeat

I think it’s safe to say in 2025 that the strata of American society that called itself “left” over the previous decades has failed to bring about the goals one

normally associates with the left-wing of politics. They have not only failed to achieve anything in our case, however, but failed even to understand how anything could be achieved. Historically, these questions have been answered by the leading theorists of Communist Parties, which use these answers to rally the people towards something better. Which begs the question: what the hell happened to the American left? And why has no Lenin or Mao emerged?

To understand why we had no Lenin, no Mao—no revolutionary party capable of leading—we have to stop looking for great men and start looking at the real movement of history itself. We have to find the simplest, most basic thread that, when pulled, unravels the whole thing. That thread is the very definition of a ”left” in the particular sense of the bourgeois epoch: its abstract, core function is to be the organized, most advanced force of the working class in its fight for power - the institution that can be a central hub and leader that creates a concrete, independent political power of, by, and for the working class. That’s what it is, in its barest form. And for a time, our Communist Party was that force. It was the first integrated political organization, it built the CIO, it fought for the eight-hour day—it was a real, concrete force because it was made from the very stuff of the working class’s struggle. Those victories were the ideal made real, proof that the left and the class were one thing.

But an abstraction has to become concrete to live, and that’s where things went wrong. We have to see this process as a whole, a totality of contradictions. The rise of the mid-century middle classes wasn't a simple, national event. It was a complex, contradictory moment within the larger, global process of capitalism transitioning into its highest, globalized, financialized stage. And within that national contradiction, another, more profound one was playing out: the Black Freedom Struggle, which we will argue in a later essay was nothing less than our Third American Revolution, the concrete continuation of the unfinished business of Reconstruction.

During the Jim Crow era, the black proletariat—super-exploited, segregated, and denied the fruits of the emerging consumer society—once again became the primary revolutionary subject of American history, just as it had been during the Civil War. Their struggle to smash the apartheid state and enter the mainstream of American life, including the new middle classes, was a profoundly political revolution. Led by figures like Martin Luther King Jr., this movement didn’t just seek a place at the table; it sought to transform the entire nation, to create a more concretized, fully integrated American people. A more

American America. Their demands were the cutting edge of the class struggle in our national process, the force that was pushing the whole society forward.

But this revolutionary energy was channeled into a contradictory goal: entry into a social form—the American middle class—that was itself a temporary, unstable product of a capitalism already beginning to falter beneath the weight of its own contradictions. This is the dialectical trap. The victory of entering that world was simultaneously a defeat. The ground was already shifting. The whole economic foundation beneath everyone's feet was transforming. This wasn't about clever plots in boardrooms. This was capitalism doing what it does: evolving to overcome its own crises. The old economy of making things—of factories and solid value—begins to take on a more and more global form as the latter half of the twentieth century advances and technology overcomes the old limitations. Put simply, due to the continual process of class struggle and the development of superior technologies that capitalism must create, it became cheaper to make commodities in countries where labor had not yet won for itself things like eight hour work days or pension funds. Within the US, financialization was taking over. The end of the gold standard and the rise of debt-based money wasn't just a policy change; it was the sign of a deeper cancer. The real circuit of capital, M-C-M', based in concrete commodity production, was being replaced by the vampire logic of pure finance, M-M', where money begets money through debt and speculation.

This new, more abstract form of monopoly finance capitalism had created that middle class as its special product. This wasn't the old petty bourgeoisie of the early industrial era. This was a layer of the working class that got a temporary deal. Through brutal struggle, they won union wages, pensions, and access to home ownership—a little piece of property-backed debt that felt like stability.

And this is where the white left got cut in two and lost the plot. The old left, built for the industrial age, found its base crumbling as factories fled overseas. But worse, as the revolutionary energy of the civil rights movement won its victories and a section of the black proletariat entered the middle class, the white left failed to grasp the new totality. They began to think like the middle class. Their ideology rose directly from these new, less desperate conditions. They developed the classic liberalism that comes from a lack of immediate necessity—the same thing Mao identified in 1937. He called it "petty-bourgeois selfishness," where people approve of Marxism in the abstract, or even as some abstract moral argument, but they refuse to practice it,

which demands a more scientific outlook. They put their personal feelings and moral posturing above the material needs of the class struggle.

This liberalism became the ideology of the ”new left.” It wasn't revolutionary; it was a reflection of a class fraction living off the financialized crumbs of imperialism. A new, wider, and institutional form of Lenin’s concept of a labor aristocracy. This institutional labor aristocracy developed and solidified their hold over what the American people saw as the “left” over the next few decades, through the 80’s and 90’s, catching a large boost when the Soviet Union fell, and ultimately only seeing cracks appear in the surface in the early 2000’s. During this time, they began to mistake the ruling class's ideology—the identity politics pushed by Citigroup and Raytheon—for their own. They became obsessed with pronouns and drag queen story hours, looking down with disgust at the working people who were more concerned with putting food on the table than with performative wokeness. They became the perfect useful idiots for finance capital, happily dividing the working class into a million little pieces for the bourgeoisie to keep in check.

So, we arrive at the concrete truth. The question wasn't ”Where are our great leaders?” The answer is that a Lenin is only possible as the synthesis of a revolutionary theory and a revolutionary class. The existing ”left” became the synthesis of liberalism and a decaying middle class. It abandoned the working class because its very social being was no longer proletarian. Everything genuinely left-wing about it falls out of the bottom at this point, and it became a left in name only - an ideological puppet for the ruling class, lecturing the people it left behind from a position of dying privilege. They can call themselves Marxists all they want, talk about “revolution” and “working class” ‘til the cows come home, but reality doesn’t care about their magic words. They are, in every material sense that matters, a right-wing force.

And to them, the only thing we can say now that we are here is: kick rocks. The real left will have to be rebuilt from the ground up by the class they abandoned.

But Noah, Middle Class Isn't a Marxist Term: Definition-Mongering and the Metaphysics of the Fake Left

Every time I bring up the middle classes, the same chorus emerges from the digital mist, torches and little hammer-and-sickle emojis in hand, to correct me.

“But Noah,” they chirp, “ ‘Middle class’ isn’t a Marxist term! Class is about your relationship to the means of production!” This objection isn’t just wrong; it’s a perfect symptom of the disease that killed the American left. It represents a failure to think dialectically, to ascend from a dead, formal abstraction to the living, concrete totality.

This knee-jerk correction is what I’ve come to call definition-mongering. It’s like when you kick your leg out when the doctor hits it with one of those little triangle mallets. It’s a brain-kick. An ideological reflex that mistakes a word for the concept it signifies. It seizes on the immediate sensual appearance of a term—“middle class”—and, instead of probing its concrete meaning within a specific historical context, it flees into the realm of subjective memory. It searches for a “universal definition” divorced from time and place, a static formula to be applied dogmatically. This is the opposite of the Marxist method. Marxism doesn’t traffic in frozen definitions; it deals in developing concepts that reflect the motion of the real world.

We could call the phenomenon we’re analyzing “pink unicorns” for all it matters. If we both understand that by “pink unicorns” we mean that social stratum which arose in 20th-century America as a specific product of financialized imperialism—a layer of the working class that temporarily secured a mediated existence through union contracts, pensions, and mortgaged debt—then the term is functionally correct. The sound our mouths make is irrelevant; what matters is the concrete concept in our minds. The fetishization of the word over the concept is pure idealism. As Engels mocked the anarchists, “These gentlemen think that when they have changed the names of things they have changed the things themselves.”

This is more than a semantic error. It’s a fundamental failure of worldview, a retreat into the pre-Hegelian swamp of formal logic and metaphysical thinking. The fake left, educated in bourgeois universities and funded by bourgeois foundations, has internalized this method. It cannot grasp that a thing is what it is only through the sum of its relations and its history. It sees “proletariat” and “bourgeoisie” as fixed, eternal poles, never comprehending the necessary, contradictory movement between them that gives rise to new social forms. The 20th-century American middle class is one such form—not a deviation from the Marxist schema but its necessary concrete development under monopoly capitalism.

This theoretical bankruptcy had material consequences. It created a “left” that could be effortlessly liquidated and reconfigured as a tool of the ruling class.

When the CIA launched the Congress for Cultural Freedom, funding the Frankfurt School and its offshoots, it wasn't funding overt anti-communism, after all. It was funding what CIA whistle-blower Thomas Braden (one of those responsible for its creation) called a compatible left—one that sounded radical but was built on a foundation of idealism and metaphysical thinking, devoid of the unity of theory and practice that all Marxism is built upon. This was a left that could be obsessed with pronouns and identity, could write endless books and hold endless forums (often with cash from the Open Society Foundation), precisely because it was harmless, because it was defined by that lack of practice meeting theory. It debated the definition of "class" while forgetting the class itself. It was a left that was permitted to exist precisely because it would never, could never, grasp the concrete totality of imperialist society.

And it therefore could never threaten it.

This period of falsification was made possible by what Stalin, describing the pre-WWI era and Second International, called the "relatively peaceful development of capitalism." Our peaceful period was the age of the middle classes. It was an era where the worst contradictions of imperialism were exported, and a section of the American working class won a temporary respite. This created the conditions for a new form of what W.E.B. Du Bois called the "American Assumption" to rise within American society. Dubois's "American Assumption," (AA) put simply, was the belief throughout American society that one, through hard work and thrift, could become bourgeois. By the 20th century, the development of the monopoly cartels and financial institutions that lorded over everything had made such a notion little more than a cruel joke, but some abstract remnant of the AA remained in the minds of Americans, giving rise to our 20th Century Assumption. In this form, the worker may not be able to become bourgeois, but through thrift and hard work, he could, if he took on enough debt and paid his tribute to the Lord Banker on High, become middle class. This material reality bred a corresponding ideology: not revolutionary class consciousness, but flabby philistinism, parliamentary cretinism, and a dogmatic, definition-mongering approach to theory.

The old Communist Party USA, the home of heroes like W.E.B. Du Bois and William Z. Foster, was ultimately hollowed out by this process. It became overrun by a middle-class stratum whose social being determined its thought. It replaced dialectics with dogma, revolutionary practice with sordid political bargaining. By the time of the 34th National Convention, the renegade clique led by Joe Sims could openly trash the Party's constitution and align with the

genocidal forces of the Democrats, because the Party had long since ceased to be a moment of the proletariat's activity (and, frankly, the proletariat had all but forgotten it existed). It had become a moment of the decaying middle class, and thus, inevitably, a moment of the bourgeoisie it served.

The reconstitution of the Party on a new basis is proof that this historical phase has ended. The peaceful development is over and necessity is upon us once more. The middle class is dissolving back into the proletariat from which it came, and the fake left, with its definition-mongering and its metaphysical reflexes, is being exposed as the right-wing force it always was.

But to build a real left, we must first master the method we were denied. We must learn to think not in static definitions, but in developing contradictions. We must understand that the "American people" are not a static collection of races or ethnicities, as the woke race-realists believe, but a concrete, historically formed whole, riven with class contradictions that are themselves moments of global capital's development.

This requires us to understand the core of the Marxist method: the dialectical movement from the abstract to the concrete. We must learn to see how the most abstract cell-form of a phenomenon—be it a class, a commodity, or a left wing—contains within itself the immanent logic of its own development into a complex, interconnected totality. This is the only way to overcome the legacy of definition-mongering and metaphysical thinking. It is the only way to understand not just what the middle class was, but why it rose, why it fell, and what its decay means for the class struggle ahead. We must learn to see the world not as a collection of fixed things, but as a process of becoming.

And to do that, we must first understand how Marxism itself conceives of this development. We must understand the dialectics of the abstract and the concrete.

The Ascension to the Concrete: Our Method and Our Task

We've spent this essay diagnosing the disease—the metaphysical thinking and middle-class idealism that liquidated the American left. We've gone over one or two forms this has taken with woke-ism and definition mongering. We've called it out for what it is: a right-wing force masquerading as a left, a symptom

of a deeper theoretical bankruptcy. But a diagnosis is useless without a cure. That cure is not some new set of slogans, but a new way of looking at the problem. Or, really, it is a new way that is at the same time an old way. It is the method of investigation and presentation that is the very heart of Marxism Leninism, a method the fake left abandoned long ago. It's what Marx, in the Grundrisse, called the ascension from the abstract to the concrete. And no, this isn't academic jargon. It is the practical, scientific process of revolutionary cognition.

Put simply, in order to solve the problem, we need to learn how to think about the problem.

The bourgeois education system—and the fake left it produced—is trapped in a pre-Hegelian nightmare of metaphysical thinking. It teaches us through rote memorization, through standardized tests that demand we regurgitate frozen definitions and isolated facts. We learn the word "proletariat" but not the living, developing *concept* of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject created by and destined to overthrow capital. We see history as a list of names and dates, not as the concrete totality of class struggles that it is. This method is a relic of 17th-century British empiricism, and seems almost perfectly designed to produce compliant citizens and useless activists, but utterly incapable of producing revolutionaries who can comprehend and therefore change the world.

This is why, as Lenin insisted, you cannot understand the first chapter of *Capital* without understanding all of Hegel's Logic. He wasn't being pretentious; he was stating a blunt, material fact. Capital is not merely a book about economics or categories with which to think about how capital is formed; it is a rigorous, page-by-page demonstration of the dialectical method in motion. To read it with the metaphysical, formal-logical brain we've been trained to use is to miss the point entirely. You will see the trees—the coats, the linen, the currency, the commodity—but you will be blind to the forest: the self-moving, contradictory, explosive totality of capitalist social relations.

You will not grasp *value.*

So, let's cut through the confusion and lay out this method, step-by-step. The "ascension to the concrete" is not a poetic phrase. It is a precise scientific description of how thought must mirror the development of reality itself in order to properly grasp that development and therefore the reality. It is a process consisting of several necessary moments.

Step 1: Starting with the Chaotic Concrete (The Phenomenon)

Our starting point is always the real, sensuous world—the ”chaotic concrete.” This is the complex, bewildering reality we experience every day: rising prices, stagnant wages, political decay, culture wars. It appears as a chaotic jumble of effects without a clear cause. The bourgeois mind stops here, skimming headlines and reacting to sensations, judging everything according to which characteristics it has, and never understanding how those characteristics formed or what they mean. The Marxist, in contrast, begins here - recognizing this chaos as the phenomenon that must be explained.

Step 2: The Analytic Moment (The Descent into the Abstract)

From this chaotic whole, we must analytically isolate the simplest, most abstract, and most universal relation—the ”cell-form” that contains within itself the seed of the entire system. This is not a random choice; it is discovered through rigorous investigation. For Marx, analyzing capitalism, this was the commodity. Not any specific commodity, but the commodity as such, the simplest economic relation in bourgeois society. This is a moment of reduction. We are breaking down the complex whole into its most elementary part. This abstract cell-form seems poor and empty compared to the rich complexity of the real world. But its poverty is its power. By isolating it, we isolate the fundamental contradiction that drives the entire system. In the commodity, this is the contradiction between use-value (its concrete, material utility) and exchange-value (its abstract, social value expressed in money).

Step 3: The Unfolding of the Abstract (The Ascent Begins)

Here is the dialectical heart of the method. We do not add other abstractions to our simple cell-form. Instead, we force it to reveal its own inner logic. We ask: what are the necessary implications of this simple relation? How does its internal contradiction necessarily develop into more complex forms?

Marx demonstrates this brilliantly. The contradiction within the commodity necessitates a universal equivalent to express exchange-value—money. The dynamics of money, seeking its own increase, necessarily transform it into capital (M-C-M’). The pursuit of profit leads to exploitation (the extraction of surplus value), which leads to competition, which leads to the concentration of capital, and so on. Each new category (profit, rent, interest) is not introduced from the outside; it is derived as the necessary consequence of the previous one.

The abstract cell-form is unfolding, becoming richer, developing itself through its own immanent logic. We do this for every moment within the development of the phenomenon under study, just as Marx did in *Capital.* In doing this, we are continually carrying out this process of "ascending" to the concrete, to reflect what is already concrete in reality in our minds, in a concrete, thorough, and scientific manner.

Step 4: The Results: The Concrete-in-Thought

By following this immanent logic to its conclusion, we do not return to the chaotic concrete we started with. Instead, we arrive at the concrete-in-thought—a rich totality of many determinations and relations. We now understand the chaotic whole theoretically. We see how the stock market is connected to the factory floor, how a political vote is connected to an international supply chain, how a cultural trend is connected to the falling rate of profit. The whole is reproduced in our mind as a structured, interconnected, self-moving system. This is the "ascension." We have ascended from a one-sided, empty abstraction (the commodity) to a comprehensive, scientific understanding of the capitalist totality. The abstract has become concrete in our thinking.

This is why the proletariat is central. Marx did not choose it out of some bleeding-heart, liberal moral sympathy. Through this method, he demonstrated that the proletariat is not just another class but the necessary product and ultimate negation of the capital-relation. Moreover, it is the "determining element" in this relation because its very existence embodies the fundamental contradiction of the system itself. Its struggle is not an external force acting on capitalism, but the system's own internal contradiction playing out in the form of class warfare. To understand this is to have a concrete concept of the proletariat.

(Notice how our concept has nothing to do with wages? Repeated here for posterity: kick rocks, fake left. Marxism is back in America and you'll just have to deal with that fact.)

This method is our weapon. It is how we will, in the essays to follow, dismantle the appearances of modern American capitalism and lay bare its rotting core. We will not simply list facts about inequality or deindustrialization. We will ascend to the concrete. Our analysis will follow this exact logical progression:

We will begin with the most abstract determination of modern capital: the shift to full financialization (M-M’). We will isolate this as our cell-form. We will demonstrate how this is not a policy choice but the necessary outcome of capital’s flight from the falling rate of profit in the industrial circuit (M-C-M’) and the class struggle of the American proletariat, with the bourgeoisie’s side hiding its stability behind debts that are now falling on its head like rain made of hammers. We will unfold its logic to show how debt, speculation, and asset-price inflation have become the primary modes of accumulation, creating a global vampire economy that is no longer satisfied with the economies of other countries, but has begun to feed on the American economy itself.

From this, we will ascend to the phenomenon of globalization. We will show how the globalized supply chain is the concrete form production takes under fully financialized imperialism. It is the material reality of the M-M' circuit, where industrial production is subordinated to the flow of financial capital, creating a renewed revolutionary spirit outside of the United States and a new necessity of revolutionary change within it.

This ascent will allow us to grasp the American trajectory, which must be a process understood alongside the American class struggle. It is the historical development of a people. We will reject the woke race-realism that sees only static ethnic blocs and seeks to pit American against American. Instead, we will analyze how the concrete totality of class struggle, from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement (our Third Revolution), forged a single American people through fire and conflict, a people now being torn apart by the contradictions of the very financialized system that has unified them.

Finally, we will arrive at the most pressing concrete reality of our time: re-proletarianization. The dissolution of the middle class is not an accident. It is the necessary result of the decaying logic of M-M'. The ”stability” of the 20th-century middle class was a historical anomaly, a temporary product of imperialist super-profits and a specific balance of class forces. That period is over. Financialization now demands the stripping away of those mediations—the pensions, the union wages, the mortgaged property—and the forcible return of millions to their fundamental class relation: a proletariat with nothing to sell but its labor power, now within a brutally financialized landscape, a lack of proletarian labor, and a future of servitude and burger flipping in front of it.

This is the concrete basis that the reconstitution of the American left and its Communist Party is being built upon. A basis that is full of objective,

revolutionary potential and wanting only of the consciousness and organization to seize it.

The old left is dead. It was killed by its own metaphysical thinking, its inability to ascend from the abstract dogma of the past to the concrete reality of the present, and the middle class status it acquired. The task before us is to think, to analyze, and to organize with a method that matches the complexity of our enemy. We must master the dialectic, not as a philosophy, but as a weapon - the hammer we use to smash our enemy. The ascent to the concrete is our path to revolution. Marx tells us in *The German Ideology* that Communism is the real movement of history. It is time to move up that path. We have waited too long, and the last generation has left us with nothing. So, we must do it ourselves. American Communism must begin now.

3

Chinese Exclusion and the Origins of Immigration as Class Warfare

Scott P. Smith[1]

1. Migration as Discipline

Chinese workers were among the most ruthlessly exploited labor forces in 19th century America—and among the most thoroughly erased from its memory. These men carved tunnels through the Sierra Nevada, hauled rail lines across deserts, and endured brutal, often fatal, working conditions in service of a nation that would never recognize their contribution. Railroads could have been built by native-born workers earning a living wage. Capital chose the cheaper path.

This is not just a story of hardship and racial discrimination. It is a story of capital exploiting migration to discipline labor, of state power weaponized to

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divide workers, and of organized labor's failure to defend its own class.[2] Chinese workers were brought to the United States because they were cheap, mobile, and vulnerable—the perfect foil to rising white and black labor militancy in the post-Civil War era. Their presence was manipulated to suppress wages, break strikes, and fragment class consciousness.

Once their utility had passed, they were expelled. With the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, immigration policy became a tool for labor discipline—shaped less by principle than by the needs of capital. Instead of resisting this, much of organized labor endorsed it. Leaders like Terence Powderly openly advocated for exclusion, setting a precedent that would haunt the movement for generations.

This essay traces that arc of betrayal. It follows Chinese laborers from their arrival and exploitation through the political violence of exclusion and the long shadow it cast over American labor strategy. In doing so, it argues that excluding Chinese workers fractured the labor movement at its foundation—undermining solidarity and setting a pattern of division that continues to shape today's struggles over immigration and labor. To understand this past is to confront the present more clearly. Working-class unity cannot be built without remembering who was sacrificed to prevent it.

2. Chinese Labor During Post-Civil War Expansion

The postwar boom in American industry created a ravenous demand for cheap labor. Nowhere was this clearer than in the construction of the transcontinental railroad—a project meant to bind the coasts, plunder western resources, and consolidate U.S. control over newly annexed territory. Marketed as a national triumph, the railroad was in truth a test case for a new kind of labor regime: flexible, expendable, and racialized.

Chinese laborers, fleeing famine, the Taiping Rebellion, and economic upheaval in Guangdong and Fujian, began arriving on the West Coast in large numbers in

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2. Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. 1* (New York: International Publishers, 1947), 488–93; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. 2* (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 58–60, 204-5, Foner's volumes are foundational for understanding organized labor's role in shaping exclusion-era policy. While he does not dwell on the lived experiences of Chinese workers, his account makes clear how exclusion was accepted—and sometimes promoted—by labor leadership. The limits of his treatment help underscore the very dynamic this essay seeks to expose.

the 1850s.[3] Initially funneled into gold mines and small-scale agriculture, their labor was soon redirected toward a more imperial task: building the iron spine of westward expansion. By the mid-1860s, they comprised the majority of the Central Pacific Railroad workforce.[4] The company, under the direction of figures like Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker, Mark Hopkins, and Collis Huntington, stopped hiring white workers almost entirely, preferring Chinese crews for their perceived docility, endurance, and lack of political demands.

They were worked harder, paid less, and lodged separately in segregated camps.[5] While white workers earned as much as $35 a month, Chinese workers earned $26 a month and they had to pay for their own food, fuel, and shelter.[6] Most of the dangerous jobs—hanging from ropes to plant dynamite, clearing rockslides, or laying track across snow-covered mountains—fell to Chinese laborers, and hundreds died from frostbite, collapse, starvation, or explosions. Their names were almost never recorded.[7]

The company maintained strict oversight through isolation and supply control, limiting workers' ability to seek recourse or appeal for redress.[8] No official translators were provided, and few accommodations were made for language barriers. They were sealed off entirely—by distance, language, and design. Scattered across the Sierra Nevadas, the camps were snowbound, remote, and barely accessible—closer to frontier outposts than labor sites. Workers toiled in bitter cold and rugged terrain, miles from any settlement, linked only by narrow tracks and telegraph wire.[9]

In 1867, over 3,000 Chinese workers mounted a disciplined labor action, refusing to lay another rail until their demands were met. The strike was strategically timed and logistically coordinated across multiple mountain camps.[10] They demanded better pay, shorter hours, and an end to abusive

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3. Gordon H. Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), 15, 21–2, 25; Erika Lee, *At America's Gates* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1, 2, 25, 112–15, Chang reconstructs the experiences of Chinese railroad workers and the structural marginalization they faced in both historical records and public memory. Lee situates Chinese exclusion within the broader evolution of U.S. immigration policy, highlighting its intersections with labor regulation, race formation, and state-building during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

4. Chang, Ghosts of Gold Mountain, 55.

5. Chang, 73, 92, 95.

6. Chang, 73, 142–43.

7. Chang, 76, 88, 107, 119–20, 220–30, 234–36, 243, 292–94.

8. Chang, 73, 86, 140–47, 150, 152, 157, 275–76.

9. Chang, 102–8, 112, 115–17, 119, 130–31, 134, 171–72, 192–93.

10. Chang, 138, 147–48, 151–60, 275–76.

oversight. For seven days, construction halted across much of the route. The railroad responded by surrounding their camps, cutting off food shipments, and deploying armed guards. Lacking broader support, the strike ultimately failed—yet it left a legacy. Chinese laborers had shown they could organize under impossible conditions.

When the railroad was completed in 1869, Chinese workers were excluded from the Golden Spike ceremony and written out of celebratory histories. They were absent from the photographs, omitted from the speeches—as if they had never laid a rail.[11] One article, published on the day of the Golden Spike ceremony, ran the heading "Chinese Laborers at Table"—a rare moment of acknowledgment, quickly forgotten amid the public celebrations that omitted them entirely.[12] Their bodies remained buried along the line, unmourned and uncounted. Chinese railroad workers were never the majority of Chinese in America—but their labor was among the most visible, grueling, and essential. A nation with honor would have remembered them and protected their kin. Instead, it punished them all.

After the spike was driven and the press moved on, Chinese laborers were offered no compensation, no pensions, and no reintegration. Many were forced into seasonal agricultural labor, low-wage factory work, or urban service jobs in hostile cities. Some returned to China, though most could not afford to. Wherever they went next—agriculture, factories, service work—they remained isolated by language, policy, and law. Their exploitation did not stop with the railroad—it followed them into every corner of the labor market.[13] But they were never passive. They organized, they endured, and they built what others refused to.

3. Labor Leadership and the Chinese Question

The Chinese presence in the American labor force triggered not only capitalist anxiety over wages but a crisis of solidarity within the emerging workers' movement. As competition between skilled and unskilled labor intensified, so did divisions along racial and national lines. Rather than uniting to confront the source of their shared exploitation, labor leadership increasingly turned to exclusionary politics.

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11. Chang, 3–5, 201–4.
12. Chang, 5.
13. Lee, At America's Gates, 233–34, 240, 247.

Terence Powderly, General Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, claimed a universalist vision of labor solidarity but harbored deep suspicion toward Chinese workers. [14] Under Powderly's leadership, the Knights endorsed legislative efforts to bar further immigration from China—framing Chinese labor as a threat to American workers and national cohesion. Though the Knights occasionally advocated for black or immigrant workers in the East, their western chapters participated in boycotts, violent mob actions, and campaigns to purge Chinese workers from entire towns. The hypocrisy of the Knights lay in their motto, "an injury to one is the concern of all," which rang hollow in the West.[15] While Powderly's faction preached unity, they redrew solidarity's boundaries whenever capital demanded it. Their betrayal of Chinese labor set a precedent: racial exclusion could be dressed in the language of worker protection.

The campaign for exclusion was not incidental; it was deliberate and opportunistic. Labor leaders like Powderly actively petitioned Congress, sponsored inflammatory rallies, and made Chinese exclusion a litmus test for political candidates. Across the West, Knights chapters portrayed Chinese workers not as fellow laborers but as threats to white workers' wages, dignity, and job security. Politicians, eager to appease an increasingly vocal labor aristocracy and facing little organized resistance—given the Chinese community's limited political representation and marginal institutional presence—found exclusion politically convenient. It was not enacted for reasons of national security, but as a concession to class fracture and racial scapegoating.

This campaign culminated in a decisive political defeat for internationalist labor: the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.[16] It marked an early failure that would weaken the labor movement for decades to come. Instead of rallying workers of all nations against their common exploiters, the Knights and their successors helped entrench the logic of racial segmentation. Exclusion laws were framed as protections for the working man, but served to shield capital from unified labor resistance and prevent the formation of a multiethnic class struggle.

4. The Legacy of Exclusion

14. Foner, Labor Movement Vol. 2, 58–60; Lee, At America's Gates, 55, 65.
15. Foner, Labor Movement Vol. 2, 56.
16. "Chinese Exclusion Act," Pub. L. No. 47–126, 22 U.S. Statutes at Large 58 (1882).

The Chinese Exclusion Act did not mark the end of anti-Chinese repression. If anything, it escalated. With legal immigration halted, attention turned to those already in the country, men isolated from their families, without political representation, and excluded from organized labor. The exclusion law emboldened local and federal authorities to crack down further, while legitimizing violent campaigns by mobs, politicians, and employers.

Dozens of Chinese workers were murdered in anti-Chinese riots from Washington to Wyoming. In Rock Springs, a mob of white miners, many affiliated with labor unions, massacred 28 Chinese miners in 1885, burned their homes, and drove hundreds from the area.[17] Similar expulsions occurred in Tacoma, Seattle, and Los Angeles. Local officials and law enforcement often looked the other way—or joined in. In some cases, Knights chapters directly instigated the violence.[18] This terror campaign was the unspoken enforcement arm of exclusion, reinforcing through fear what legislation codified.[19]

Many within the labor movement were outraged. Some unionists condemned the violence as a betrayal of working-class principles. Even members of the Knights criticized Powderly's weak response, seeing it as a failure of both leadership and moral clarity. The fracture widened—between a vision of class unity and the path of racial exclusion.

Labor-aligned newspapers stoked this climate of fear. Headlines warned of the ”Yellow Peril” and editorials portrayed Chinese workers as soulless automatons undermining American wages and morals.[20] These same outlets often justified the violence as an understandable reaction to economic pressure, softening its brutality through coded language and selective outrage. This propaganda did not emerge from the capitalist press alone—it was often echoed and amplified by unions and workingmen’s parties. The American Federation of Labor (AFL), rising to prominence after the Knights' decline, continued this trajectory

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17. Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain*, 232.

18. Foner, *Labor Movement Vol. 2*, 59.

19. “Greary Act,” Pub. L. No. 52–60, 27 U.S. Statutes at Large 25 (1892) The 1892 Geary Act renewed exclusion and introduced new humiliations: Chinese residents were required to carry internal passports, subject to deportation if they failed to comply. Chinese immigrants remained barred from naturalization and were often denied legal standing in court, especially when trying to testify against white aggressors. These restrictions established a regime of legal precarity, rendering violence and exploitation effectively consequence-free.

20. Lee, *At America’s Gates*, 36, 73.

by backing exclusionist policies and framing immigration as a danger to labor's future.[21]

5. The Division of Labor

By then, the Chinese working population had already been atomized by a growing web of laws and vigilante violence. Their presence had shifted to laundries, canneries, restaurants, and small trades—sectors abandoned or avoided by white labor. Shut out of industrial employment, they clustered in ethnic enclaves—the beginnings of what would become Chinatowns in many American cities.[22] Denied naturalization, legal recourse, and access to unions, they were left without protection or power—trapped in a precarious economy shaped by hostility and exclusion. Immigration policy made it nearly impossible for women and children to join them, severing Chinese men from family life.[23]

Labor leaders aligned with state power against Chinese workers to secure short-term support from the most reactionary segments of white workers—strengthening capital's grip at the cost of class unity. There were exceptions—moments of solidarity from black laborers, radical whites, and immigrant socialists who denounced exclusion as a betrayal of working-class principles. A handful of trade unionists condemned exclusion on class grounds, warning it would divide labor and serve the bosses. Black workers in some southern cities refused to scab against Chinese strikes.[24] But these moments were rare, and often collapsed under political pressure or institutional resistance.

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21. Foner, *Labor Movement Vol. 2*, 204–5 Under the leadership of Samuel Gompers, the AFL formalized the idea that Chinese workers—and later, Japanese, Filipino, and other Asian laborers—were simply "unorganizable." Gompers himself was an aggressive proponent of immigration restriction, repeatedly testifying before Congress and publishing anti-Asian tracts. The AFL's racial chauvinism wasn't an accident of tone; it was a deliberate pillar of its organizing philosophy.

22. Sucheng Chan, ed., *Chinese American Transnationalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 5.

23. Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 214, 216, 223, 243–44, 246–47 Deprived of their community life and native ingredients, many Chinese men struggled even to cook the food they had known. Chinese American cuisine emerged from this rupture—a creative improvisation shaped by distant memories, limited ingredients, and the struggle to recreate home in the absence of family, native produce, and shared domestic labor. What survives today in restaurants across the country is a living archive of that isolation and reinvention.

24. Foner, *Labor Movement Vol. 2*, 60.

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) offered a more sustained and principled alternative. Rejecting the AFL's racial exclusions and craft unionism, the IWW insisted that all workers—regardless of race, nationality, or skill—had a place in the class struggle.[25] Their publications denounced the idea of the "unorganizable" and made serious efforts to organize Asian laborers in the fields, canneries, and docks. In cities like San Pedro and Fresno, Wobblies refused to segregate picket lines or strike committees. These campaigns were often met with harsh repression, but they showed what was possible. The IWW demonstrated that multiracial labor solidarity was not just theoretical but actionable, even in the face of repression and isolation.

6. The Machinery of Division

From its inception, U.S. immigration law has functioned as a form of labor control. It determines who can work, under what conditions, and how securely. And by regulating the legal status of workers along lines of race, nationality, and origin, it fragments labor's ability to organize as a class.

The 1917 Immigration Act created the Asiatic Barred Zone, a sweeping racialized restriction that followed Chinese exclusion to block most Asian migration.[26] The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 established national origin quotas designed to favor immigrants from Northern Europe.[27] These were not merely cultural prejudices—they were policy instruments designed to regulate labor supply, suppress wages, and fracture class unity.

As the labor movement developed under the AFL and later the CIO[28], immigration enforcement evolved alongside it. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) imposed penalties on employers but left millions of

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25. Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. 4* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), 123.

26. "Immigration Act of 1917," Pub. L. No. 64–301, 39 U.S. Statutes at Large 874 (1917) This act introduced the first formal literacy tests and expanded exclusions by nationality and ideology.

27. "Immigration Act of 1924," Pub. L. No. 68–139, 43 U.S. Statutes at Large 153 (1924) Also known as the Johnson-Reed Act, this law established national origin quotas and effectively barred immigration from Asia.

28. The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was a federation of industrial unions founded in 1935. It championed mass organizing among unskilled workers, including immigrants and black laborers, and later merged with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1955 to form the AFL–CIO.

workers vulnerable and undocumented.[29] In the decades since, state power has increasingly served capital's need to discipline labor. ICE[30] raids, employer sanctions, and workplace audits have become standard tools for keeping undocumented workers insecure and fragmented. Raids are often sudden, militarized operations conducted at workplaces or homes, tearing families apart and instilling fear across entire communities. In recent months, mass protests have erupted in response to renewed waves of ICE enforcement, as footage of raids and detentions circulates widely. These actions serve not only to remove workers but to broadcast the consequences of resistance and visibility.

Following these aggressive enforcement tactics, the modern guest-worker system deepens the function of division through legal constraint and dependency. As of 2023, more than 370,000 H-2A[31] positions were certified, comprising a major share of the seasonal farm labor force. Despite the H-2B[32] visa's statutory cap of 66,000, actual certifications routinely exceed that number due to regulatory exemptions. These visas tie workers to a single employer, creating conditions of economic dependence, exploitation, and coercion. Wage theft is endemic— investigations reveal tens of millions in unpaid wages and systemic abuse. In some cases, workers face months or years of delay before labor violations are resolved. Far from offering protection, these programs surveil movement, restrict organizing, and weaponize deportation.[33]

This system of exclusion was not simply about race—it was also a strategy of labor control. Karl Marx, in *Capital, Volume III,* observed that one of the key countertendencies to the falling rate of profit was the artificial depression of wages below the value of labor-power. Though mentioned only empirically, he identified this as "one of the most important factors checking the tendency of

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29. "Immigration Reform and Control Act," Pub. L. No. 99–603, 100 U.S. Statutes at Large 3359 (1986) The 1986 IRCA criminalized the knowing employment of undocumented immigrants while creating a pathway to legalization for many already residing in the U.S.—a contradictory strategy that cemented both surveillance and selective amnesty into immigration law.

30. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

31. Temporary agricultural visa program.

32. Temporary non-agricultural visa program.

33. U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Foreign Labor Certification, "Foreign Labor Certification: Office of Foreign Labor Certification Annual Report FY 2023" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024), https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/foreign-labor/performance; Southern Poverty Law Center, "Close to Slavery: Guestworker Programs in the United States" (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2023), https://www.splcenter.org/2023/close-slavery; Farmworker Justice, "Farmworker Justice: Litigating for Reform" (Farmworker Justice, 2022), https://www.farmworkerjustice.org.

the rate of profit to fall."[34] The importation of cheaper labor—followed by political exclusion and legal abandonment—provided exactly this mechanism. A 2019 study confirms the empirical reality of Marx's insight: mass immigration between 1980 and 2000 reduced average wages for comparably skilled native workers by 3–4%, and by as much as 9% for the least skilled.[35] This regime of depressed wages and legal precarity formed the economic logic of exclusion, even when its political justification was racial scapegoating.

Asylum policy follows the same logic. It is granted not based on principle but utility. Refugees from socialist states are welcomed; those fleeing U.S.-aligned regimes are denied. Even successful asylum claimants face years of legal limbo, precarious work rights, and uncertainty. Asylum serves both to legitimize U.S. imperial policy and to provide a stream of exploitable labor, tightly controlled and easily threatened.

This system is upheld across party lines. Both Republican and Democrat administrations have used immigration enforcement to divide workers and serve capital. Is it truly impossible to organize migrant labor—or has capital ensured it appears that way? Legal precarity, isolation, and surveillance now do what open repression once did: instill fear and enforce fragmentation. Capital manages migration not to protect borders, but to prevent worker organization.

7. Lessons for the Present

The divisions that structured the Chinese Exclusion era still operate today. The mechanisms have evolved—visas, biometric tracking, border surveillance drones—but the function remains the same: to fragment labor, lower wages, and channel worker anger away from capital. The legal architecture of immigration continues to serve the boss, not the worker.

We are told there are only two sides: the reactionary demand to close the border, and the liberal plea to open it. Both lead to the same outcome—capital retains control. The open-borders fantasy ignores how migration under capitalism is

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34. Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. 3*, ed. Friedrich Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1959), 152. Chapter 14, "Counteracting Influences," Section II, Depression of Wages Below the Value of Labour-Power.

35. Ken-Hou Lin and Inbar Weiss, "Immigration and the Wage Distribution in the United States," *Demography* 56, no. 6 (November 22, 2019): 2229–52, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-019-00828-9.

never free. It is engineered. It is coerced. Workers move not in pursuit of abstract freedom, but under the threat of war, debt, starvation, or collapse. What the liberal celebrates as mobility, the worker experiences as dislocation. The right-wing demand for restriction, meanwhile, treats migrant workers as invaders, masking the true enemy—the employers who hire them precisely because they are precarious.

Communists must reject this false binary. We oppose capitalist-managed migration *and* nationalist labor chauvinism. We do not defend the right of capital to move labor freely across borders to undercut wages, nor do we defend the idea that native-born workers are the only legitimate participants in struggle. Our position is simple: migration must be subordinated to the needs of the working class as a whole—not the interests of capital.

Migrant labor is structured to divide. Bound to employers, denied protections, and threatened with deportation, today's migrant workers are kept in a state of dependence. The system isolates them through legal precarity, surveillance, and language barriers—eroding solidarity before it can take root. Feel-good appeals to diversity paper over these material divisions. Real unity demands more: a movement that links workers across borders, statuses, and identities to fight as one.

One powerful counter-model comes from Immokalee, Florida. There, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers—a farmworker-led organization—forced major buyers like Taco Bell, McDonald's, and Walmart to adopt legally binding agreements. These contracts require growers to meet labor standards set by workers themselves, enforced by the Fair Food Standards Council. They include a "penny-per-pound" bonus paid directly to workers, independent monitoring, and a 24/7 trilingual complaint hotline. The system gives workers real leverage—buyers must cut off farms that violate the agreement. It is one of the clearest examples in the country of organized labor reshaping the supply chain on its own terms.[36]

Proletarian internationalism is a survival strategy. Without it, we lose. Real solidarity means organizing guest workers, defending undocumented migrants from raids, and refusing to let bosses pit one group against another. The U.S. immigration system works—for capital. It divides labor, enforces dependency,

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36. "Fair Food Program," Coalition of Immokalee Workers, accessed June 22, 2025, https://ciw-online.org/fair-food-program/.

and preserves control. Clarity means naming the enemy. Not the migrant. Not the refugee. Capital itself.

The struggle ahead will require more than inclusion. It will require confrontation. We have seen what happens when the labor movement abandons the vulnerable. There is no path forward that doesn't pass through class unity. Everything else is surrender.

8. From Exclusion to Organization

The story of Chinese labor in America is not a historical anomaly. It is a concentrated expression of how capital manages migration, fragments solidarity, and manufactures consent. From the railroad camps of the 1860s to today's predawn ICE raids, the function of immigration policy has remained consistent: to create a segmented, precarious workforce that can be discarded, blamed, or ignored as needed.

This strategy only works when workers remain divided. In the 19th century, Chinese workers were portrayed as threats to national cohesion and economic stability—driving down wages, undercutting white and black labor, and refusing to assimilate. The real threat was the example they set: organizing in isolation, striking under impossible conditions, exposing the brutality of American capital. Rather than rally to their side, much of the labor movement chose exclusion—rationalized as self-protection, it delivered only weakness.

The Chinese Exclusion Act and the violence that followed were not just failures of state policy. They were failures of worker leadership. And they were not inevitable. At every juncture, labor could have chosen unity. It could have confronted the bosses instead of chasing scapegoats. It could have defended the most vulnerable instead of abandoning them. It did not.

Today, the mechanisms have changed, but the logic is the same. Capital uses the border, the visa system, and the surveillance state to create layers of legal status, sowing distrust and dependency among workers. The rhetoric has shifted—from the era of "coolie labor" to "illegal immigrants"—but the effect remains: division, fragmentation, fear.

We cannot afford to repeat these mistakes. The answer is not sentimentality or shallow inclusion. It is a disciplined, internationalist labor movement that

understands its enemy and chooses sides accordingly. Not race. Not nation. Only class.

From exclusion must come organization. This is the only path forward. To build power, we must refuse to let the ruling class write the terms of unity. We must reject their binaries, break their categories, and deny them their scapegoats. There is no reforming the logic of exclusion—it must be confronted and destroyed.

This time, we do not walk away. This time, we close ranks.

4

Palestine Solidarity and the Class Struggle: Beyond the Partisan Divide

Jonathan Brown[1]

Introduction

Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza has led to a resurgence of pro-Palestine activism in the United States, largely centered around college campuses and other leftist circles.[2] These protests have been met with a new wave of state repression – first under Biden and then Trump – involving arrests, mass police

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1. Jonathan Brown is a high school history teacher located in Athens, Georgia. He serves as Managing Editor within the Department of Education of the ACP and is a member of the Georgia chapter.

2. Rahul Mukherjee and Shoshana Gordon, "Pro-Palestinian Protests on the Rise Across the U.S.," *Axios* (December 9, 2023): https://www.axios.com/2023/12/09/palestinian-protests-us-israel-gaza-war

mobilization, and even threats of deportation. This wave of repression demonstrates the depth of America's ironclad commitment to Israel.[3]

The urgent question, then, is how to effectively mobilize support for Palestine from within the United States. At the center of this question lies the issue of how to challenge the seemingly unbreakable U.S. support for Israel. The dominant approach within the American Left has been to align the Palestinian cause with the liberal side of the political divide, capitalizing on the growing polarization across American society.[4]

However, the Left's strategy of breaking down the bipartisan pro-Israel consensus by turning Palestine into a boutique issue of the American culture wars is a recipe for failure. This strategy reduces Palestine to a matter of liberal identity politics, rather than situating it as a key component of the global struggle against Western imperialism and in support of the emerging multipolar world. In doing so, the Left risks alienating large sections of the American working-class who fall outside the narrow confines of the liberal bubble. Instead, we must root our efforts in a broader, class-based analysis. To succeed, the Palestine solidarity movement must center itself on the struggles of the American working-class and its growing dissatisfaction with U.S. imperialism.

The U.S. "Special Relationship" with Israel

From its inception, the Zionist project has been marked by a central contradiction. While claiming to fight for Jewish self-determination and sovereignty, the Zionist movement has always depended on the patronage of Western imperialist powers to establish and maintain its regime in Palestine.[5] The 1917 Balfour Declaration first secured British support for Zionist colonization, and by the mid–20th century, the United States had taken over as Israel's chief sponsor.[6] During the Cold War, President John F. Kennedy

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3. Melissa Hellmann, "They Staged Protests for Palestine. The Consequences Have Been Life-Changing," *The Guardian* (April 26, 2025): https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/26/university-student-protesters-discipline

4. Jeremy Stoddard and Diana E. Hess, "The Effects of Political Polarization on Social Studies Education and What We Should Do," *Social Education* 88(1) (January/February 2024): 11-12.

5. Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 90–91.

6. Fayez Hammad, "A Brief History of the US-Israel 'Special Relationship' Shows How Connections Have Shifted Since Long Before the 1948 Founding of the Jewish State," *USC Dornsife News* (November 29, 2023): https://dornsife.usc.edu/news/stories/brief-history-of-us-isreal-relations/

popularized the phrase "special relationship" to describe the partnership between the two states, signifying a level of U.S. support that went beyond any normal diplomatic alliance.[7] This was not simply a matter of shared values or partisan politics, but a structural feature of American hegemony in the Middle East. Behind the official propaganda of "freedom" and "democracy," Israel functioned as a reliable client state serving the interests of U.S. monopoly capital. As Robert Kennedy Jr. bluntly admitted, "Israel is a bulwark for us… it's almost like having an aircraft carrier in the Middle East."[8] Likewise, former president Joe Biden has repeatedly quipped, "if there were not an Israel, we'd have to invent one."[9] For decades, groups like the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) worked tirelessly to preserve this bipartisan consensus, and for decades they largely succeeded. Yet today, that consensus is beginning to fracture, and the so-called "special relationship" is beginning to show signs of faltering.

The emerging cracks in the U.S.–Israel "special relationship" cannot be understood apart from the broader phenomenon of *political polarization* in American society. Political scientists use this term to describe the sharpening partisan divide between Democrats and Republicans, especially since the 1960s, when the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and the social upheavals of the New Left reshaped the party system.[10] Over the past half-century, polarization has been fueled primarily by so-called "culture war" issues – abortion, gun rights, religion in schools, race, gender, and sexuality – that have transformed U.S. politics into a battlefield of identity and morality rather than class.[11] Throughout this period, pro-Israel lobby groups like AIPAC worked relentlessly to insulate support for Israel from these partisan divisions, cultivating a bipartisan consensus that treated Israel as untouchable, "above the

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7. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel since 1948: A 'Special Relationship'?" *Diplomatic History* 22(2) (April 1998): 231–262, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7709.00115

8. Dáire Cumiskey, "Is Israel the Loyal Watchdog of US Imperialism?" *Socialist Worker* (November 12, 2023): https://socialistworker.co.uk/in-depth/is-israel-the-loyal-watchdog-of-us-imperialism/

9. Muhannad Ayyash, "Biden Says the U.S. Would Have to Invent an Israel if It Didn't Exist. Why?" *The Conversation* (July 24, 2023): https://theconversation.com/biden-says-the-u-s-would-have-to-invent-an-israel-if-it-didnt-exist-why-210172

10. Kiara Alfonseca, "Culture Wars: How Identity Became the Center of Politics in America," *ABC News* (July 7, 2023): https://abcnews.go.com/US/culture-wars-identity-center-politics-america/story?id=100865511

11. James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

fray."[12] For decades this strategy succeeded, ensuring that Democrats and Republicans alike voted in lockstep for military aid, diplomatic protection, and economic cooperation with Israel. Today, however, this consensus is beginning to erode. The very polarization that the Zionist lobby sought to avoid is seeping into the question of Palestine, threatening to destabilize one of the most important pillars of U.S. imperial hegemony.

Beginning in 2007, Zionists began to sound the alarm over what they called the "distancing hypothesis" – the observation that younger generations of American Jews, especially liberals, were becoming increasingly alienated from Israel.[13] This set off a flood of research, opinion polls, focus groups, and anxious think pieces from Zionist institutions, all lamenting that young Jews were no longer embracing Israel with the same fervor as their parents and grandparents.[14] In response, wealthy Jewish philanthropists and advocacy organizations poured millions into programs aimed at reversing the trend: Zionist summer camps, free "Birthright" trips to Israel, and campus groups like Hillel – all designed to strengthen ties between American Jews and the Zionist regime.[15]

This reaction from Zionists has been both tone deaf and deeply revealing. They typically explain the problem as one of ignorance or apathy: young Jews are "self-hating," disconnected from their Judaism, or influenced by "anti-Semitic friends" who criticize Israel.[16] Rarely do they consider the more obvious explanation – that many young Jews are distancing themselves because they are too well educated on the reality of Israel's colonial violence.[17] For them, Israel's treatment of Palestinians sits uneasily beside the Jewish ethical

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12. Alon Ben-Meir, "Above the Fray: AIPAC's Misguided Advocacy," *The Jerusalem Post* (August 19, 2011): https://www.jpost.com/magazine/judaism/above-the-fray-aipacs-misguided-advocacy

13. Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman, *Beyond Distancing: Young Adult American Jews and Their Alienation from Israel* (New York: The Jewish Identity Project of Reboot; Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, 2007), 1-35.

14. Samuel J. Abrams, "The Distancing from Israel Hypothesis Is Disturbingly Re-Affirmed," *Jewish Journal* (March 5, 2024): https://jewishjournal.com/commentary/opinion/368960/the-distancing-from-israel-hypothesis-is-disturbingly-re-affirmed/

15. Georgia Gee, "Birthright Israel Is Booming This Year. Here's How the Israeli Propaganda Trip Works," *The Intercept* (June 10, 2025): https://theintercept.com/2025/06/10/israel-birthright-trip-jewish-americans/

16. Dana Levinson Steiner, "Millennial Jews Are Choosing Between Israel and Social Acceptance," *The Times of Israel* (May 2, 2022): https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/millennial-jews-are-choosing-between-israel-and-social-acceptance/

17. Norman G. Finkelstein, *Knowing Too Much: Why the American Jewish Romance with Israel Is Coming to an End* (New York: OR Books, 2012), xv.

traditions they were raised on. In short, Zionist cannot admit that Israel itself is the problem.

The uproar over the distancing hypothesis reflects a broader trend of political polarization across American society. Public opinion data demonstrates this clearly. A survey by Pew Research Center in April 2025 found that 53% of U.S. adults now express an unfavorable view of Israel, with 71% of Democrats aged 18–49 holding negative views.[18] Similarly, a Gallup poll from the same period found that only 8% of Democrats supported Israel's actions in Gaza.[19] Younger liberals in particular frame Israel not as a victim, but as an aggressor – a colonial entity undermining the liberal ideals of human rights and equality. For them, Palestine is cast through the lens of domestic struggles against racism and white supremacy: Israel as a "white European settler-colonial state," Palestinians as victims akin to Black Americans under Jim Crow.[20] In this view, solidarity with Palestine becomes not just a foreign policy stance but a moral imperative.

Meanwhile, support for Israel has become increasingly concentrated among conservatives. Several factors explain this. First, Israeli society has shifted to the right in recent decades, abandoning its socialist roots in Labor Zionism for the political dominance of Benjamin Netanyanu and the far-right Likud Party.[21] This political culture has resonated with many U.S. conservatives, who see Israel's nationalist policies as aligned with their own values. Second, economic conservatives have been enamoured with Israel's status as a "start-up nation" that values entrepreneurship and cutting edge technology.[22] Third, Christian conservatives now make up Israel's largest base of support in the U.S.[23] They tend to view Israel as part of shared "Judeo-Christian" values that stands as a

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18. Laura Silver, "How Americans View Israel and the Israel-Hamas War at the Start of Trump's Second Term," *Pew Research Center* (April 8, 2025): https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/04/08/how-americans-view-israel-and-the-israel-hamas-war-at-the-start-of-trumps-second-term/

19. Megan Brenan, "32% in U.S. Back Israel's Military Action in Gaza, a New Low," *Gallup* (July 29, 2025): https://news.gallup.com/poll/692948/u.s.-back-israel-military-action-gaza-new-low.aspx

20. Haleema Shah, "Is Israel a 'Settler-Colonial' State? The Debate, Explained," *Vox* (April 17, 2024): https://www.vox.com/world-politics/24128715/israel-palestine-conflict-settler-colonialism-zionism-history-debate

21. Ramtin Arablouei, Rund Abdelfatah, et al., "The Rise of the Right Wing in Israel," *NPR* (March 7, 2024): https://www.npr.org/2024/03/07/1198908601/throughline-the-rise-of-the-right-wing-in-israel

22. Dan Senor and Saul Singer, *Start-Up Nation* (New York: Twelve, 2011).

23. Tiffany Stanley, "Why Conservative American Evangelicals Are Among Israel's Strongest Supporters," *AP News* (February 5, 2025): https://apnews.com/article/israel-netanyahu-trump-evangelicals-jews-gaza-52126902c8dc767238099a1cc1930a16

bulwark of Western civilization against the imaginary threat of political Islam. Their support for Israel is rooted in its role in the supposed end times: Jesus' return to Earth, a bloody battle at Armageddon, and Jesus ruling the world from Jerusalem.[24] Finally, neoconservatives have long viewed Israel as a bastion of freedom and democracy in the Middle East that must be defended militarily as part of the global War on Terror.[25] These overlapping currents have consolidated Israel as a cause of the political right, while liberals increasingly see it as a contradiction of their professed values.

This polarization has not yet shifted U.S. government policy, which remains firmly pro-Israel. But in the realm of public opinion, the bipartisan consensus has clearly fractured. On the one hand, this collapse of unquestioned support is a welcome development, as it signals that Israel is no longer immune from criticism. On the other hand, tethering Palestine too closely to the liberal side of the partisan divide risks narrowing its appeal and alienating millions of Americans outside the "woke" liberal bubble. U.S. support for Israel is not simply a matter of partisan identity or cultural values – it is rooted in the material logic of American imperialism. To effectively challenge it, Palestine solidarity must transcend the liberal/conservative divide and anchor itself in the class interests of the American working-class as a whole.

In the sections that follow, I will examine three fundamental flaws in the political polarization strategy currently employed by much of the American left in its approach to Palestine. These flaws reveal why embedding Palestine into a partisan culture war framework is not only ineffective but actively counterproductive. I will then conclude by outlining how the American Communist Party (ACP) can offer a superior path forward – one rooted in working-class struggle, directed against imperialism, and aligned with the emerging multipolar world as part of the broader road toward socialism.

Polarization as Symptom, Not Solution

The American left's embrace of political polarization as a strategy for Palestine solidarity reveals a fundamental misrecognition of the nature of polarization

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24. Sarah Posner, "The Dispiriting Truth About Why Many Evangelical Christians Support Israel," *MSNBC* (October 22, 2023): https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/truth-many-evangelical-christians-support-israel-rcna121481

25. Abdullah Noorudeen, "The Neoconservative War on Terror Cannot Be Understood Without Israel," *CAGE* (June 25, 2021): https://www.cage.ngo/articles/the-neoconservative-war-on-terror-cannot-be-understood-without-israel

itself. As Mao Zedong explained in his 1957 essay *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, social contradictions can be divided into two broad types: antagonistic contradictions, which are irreconcilable (such as the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat), and non-antagonistic contradictions, which can be resolved without rupture, through persuasion, debate, or compromise.[26] Mao stressed that a revolutionary movement must be rooted in the antagonistic contradiction of class struggle, since it is only through the overthrow of the bourgeoisie that socialism can be achieved. By contrast, contradictions among the people – cultural, ideological, or moral disputes – while important, do not themselves rise to the level of the primary contradiction.

Political polarization in America, however, is not organized around the antagonistic contradiction of class struggle. Instead, it is structured almost entirely around non-antagonistic contradictions – cultural and moral issues – which divide the working-class against itself. Since the 1960s, issues like abortion, guns, school prayer, the death penalty, gender, and sexuality have dominated the political agenda. These issues have produced fifty years of endless debate without resolution, precisely because they are useful to the ruling class as mechanisms of division.[27] They keep workers locked into mutually hostile camps, each believing they are engaged in a life-or-death struggle, while the real antagonistic contradiction – between labor and capital – remains obscured. In this way, culture-war polarization serves as a safety valve for the bourgeoisie, preventing class solidarity and revolutionary struggle.[28]

There is also a material dimension: culture wars are profitable. Corporations and media conglomerates commodify polarization by marketing products to segmented audiences based on cultural identity.[29] Films, television shows, and advertisements are increasingly tailored to appeal to liberal or conservative sensibilities, transforming politics into a consumable brand.[30] Polarization thus

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26. Mao Tsetung, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* (February 27, 1957), Marxists Internet Archive: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm

27. Ben Burgis, "We Don't Need a Culture War. We Need a Class War," *Jacobin* (December 18, 2020): https://jacobin.com/2020/12/culture-war-class-polarization-medicare-for-all

28. Eddie L. Smith, "A Response to Daniel Tutt," *Midwestern Marx* (January 11, 2025): https://www.midwesternmarx.com/articles/a-response-to-daniel-tutt-by-eddie-l-smith

29. Francis G. Couvares, "Hollywood and the Culture Wars," *American Quarterly* 50(1) (March 1998): 192–200, https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.1998.0047.

30. Armond White, "Can Conservative Filmgoers Win the Culture War?" *National Review* (February 21, 2024): https://www.nationalreview.com/2024/02/can-conservative-filmgoers-win-the-culture-war/

becomes not a revolutionary rupture but a business model, an engine for selling commodities and advertising slots.[31] The endless circulation of culture war controversies ensures steady profits for media corporations and distracts from any challenge to monopoly capital.

For this reason, inserting Palestine into the American culture war can only guarantee its paralysis. Once reframed as a liberal identity issue, Palestine risks becoming just another unwinnable debate, endlessly contested but never resolved – precisely the fate of every other issue trapped in the orbit of polarization. Yet Palestine is not a culture-war issue. It is not primarily about identity, morality, or ideology. It is a question of imperialism. Israel is not simply a cultural symbol, but a strategic outpost of U.S. monopoly capitalism in the Middle East, central to maintaining American hegemony in the region. To reduce this to a partisan wedge issue is to abandon the real terrain of struggle.

The Pitfalls of the Liberal Identity-Politics Framework

A second major flaw in the American left's polarization strategy is its reliance on identity-politics frameworks to make sense of the Palestinian struggle.[32] Instead of situating Palestine as a central question of U.S. imperialism, the left has increasingly tied it to other fashionable identity-based grievances: racism (via Black Lives Matter), settler-colonialism (via Landback discourse), and nationalist struggles (via Ukraine). This is an example of what scholar Adolph Reed has referred to as "argument by analogy" – the tendency of the left to substitute disingenuous parallels for rigorous explanations of social phenomenon.[33] Analogizing the Palestinian struggle to boutique liberal social causes may resonate in activist circles, but it fails to mobilize the broader working-class and invites opportunities for Zionist appropriation. The result is not mass support but a niche moralism that leaves the majority of Americans unpersuaded.

The first example is the analogy drawn between the oppression of black people in America and Palestinians under Israeli apartheid. Campaigns such as Jewish

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31. Kennedy Unthank, "As Quiet as a Mouse: Disney and the 'Culture War,' " *Plugged In* (October 4, 2023): https://www.pluggedin.com/blog/as-quiet-as-a-mouse-disney-and-the-culture-war/

32. Gilbert Achcar, "Israel Is Losing American Liberals," *Catalyst: A Journal of Theory and Strategy* 5(2) (Summer 2021): 75.

33. Adolph Reed, Jr., "Socialism and the Argument Against Race Reductionism," *Socialism and Democracy* 29(2) (2020): 36-43, https://doi.org/10.1177/1095796020913869.

Voice for Peace's "Deadly Exchange" explicitly link U.S. policing with Israeli military practices.[34] While this rhetoric gains traction in liberal circles, it collapses under scrutiny. Despite challenges they face, African-Americans are not a stateless people living under foreign military occupation. The legal victories of the Civil Rights era dismantled legal segregation, even if racial inequalities persist. Today, police violence disproportionately impacts black men, but also targets the poor underclass across all races.[35] Moreover, the politics of anti-racism in the U.S. have produced few material gains for working-class black people – the most tangible "victories" of Black Lives Matter have been corporate diversity initiatives and delivering the 2020 election to Joe Biden, one of the key architects of mass incarceration.[36] Framing Palestine through the narrow lens of race reduces it to another symbolic cause within liberal identity politics. Worse still, the rhetoric of anti-racism enables Zionists to present Jews as an oppressed minority facing antisemitic discrimination from the pro-Palestine movement, positioning Israel as a "victim" in need of protection.[37] In this way, Zionists can mirror the rhetoric of anti-racism to deflect criticism and to legitimize their cause.[38]

The analogy between Palestinians and Native Americans encounters many similar limitations. In recent years, leftists have increasingly characterized Israel as a "settler-colonial" state, with Palestinians as the "indigenous people" and Israelis as "settlers."[39] Now, the settler-colonial framework contains important insights, and solidarity with indigenous peoples is essential for dismantling imperialism.[40] However, drawing an analogy between Israel and

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34. Victoria Valenzuela, " 'Deadly Exchange': US Sends Hundreds of Law Enforcement to Israel to Learn 'Worst Practices' from IDF," *The Real News Network* (January 7, 2025): https://therealnews.com/deadly-exchange-us-sends-hundreds-of-law-enforcement-to-israel-to-learn-worst-practices-from-idf

35. Nathaniel Lewis, *Mass Incarceration: New Jim Crow, Class War, or Both?* (Washington, DC: People's Policy Project, January 30, 2018): https://www.peoplespolicyproject.org/project/mass-incarceration-new-jim-crow-class-war-or-both/

36. Julie Sloane, "The Black Lives Matter Movement, but Not COVID-19, Encouraged Voters Toward Biden in the 2020 Election," *Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania* (March 2, 2022): https://www.asc.upenn.edu/news-events/news/black-lives-matter-movement-not-covid-19-encouraged-voters-toward-biden-2020-election

37. Allison Josephs, "The Marginalized Group Inclusion Spaces Forgot to Include," *Scholars & Storytellers* (January 19, 2023): https://www.scholarsandstorytellers.com/blog/diversity-in-hollywood-how-jews-have-been-left-out-of-deia-conversations

38. Due Dissidence, "Glenn Greenwald Calls Out Right Wing Free Speech Hypocrisy on Israel," *YouTube* (December 8, 2023): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM5qdh3WSwA

39. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4) (December 2006): 387–409, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240.

40. David Johnson, " 'Settler Colonialism' Can't Fully Explain Our World," *Catalyst: A Journal of Theory and Strategy* 7(3) (September 2023): 55.

America as twin settler-colonial states implies that the American working-class are "settlers" living on stolen land and therefore have no revolutionary potential.[41] This leads to the pessimistic conclusion that socialism in America is impossible because America is not a legitimate nation. Therefore, America must be Balkanized – broken up into a patchwork of small tribal ethno-states.[42] This, indeed, seems to be the logical conclusion behind the "Land Back" slogan that is popular on the left.

The academic discourse of "settler-colonialism" and the activist slogan of "Land Back" have gained popularity because they appear to offer radical solutions to the injustices of colonialism. Yet beneath the surface, these frameworks reveal serious limitations. First, they alienate the very American workers who must be mobilized to fight U.S. imperialism, since the rhetoric implies that all workers are mere "settlers" with no revolutionary role. Second, Land Back discourse poses little real threat to capitalism – indeed, it has been embraced and even funded by corporations like Amazon, turning it into another form of liberal branding rather than a vehicle for anti-imperialism.[43] Most dangerously, the settler-colonial framework invites opportunities Zionist appropriation. Zionists argue that Jews, not Palestinians, are the true indigenous people of the land, and thus portray the 1948 establishment of Israel as a kind of "Land Back" for the Jewish people after centuries of exile.[44] In this way, Zionists have successfully recast Israel as a project of decolonization.[45] Far from undermining the Israeli regime, the language of settler-colonialism actually gives it an ideological opening to present itself as the victim rather than the oppressor.

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41. Albert Bender, "What's at Stake in the Settler Colonial Debate," *Midwestern Marx* (May 12, 2022): https://www.midwesternmarx.com/articles/whats-at-stake-in-the-settler-colonial-debate-by-albert-bender

42. Kayla Popuchet, "In Defense of U.S. Proletarian Patriotism: A Comradely Response to Danny Haiphong's 'Marxist' Polemic on Patriotic Socialism," *Midwestern Marx* (December 5, 2021): https://www.midwesternmarx.com/articles/in-defense-of-us-proletarian-patriotism-a-comradely-response-to-danny-haiphongs-marxist-polemic-on-patriotic-socialism-by-kayla-popuchet

43. KOTA Staff, "NDN Collective Gets Awarded $12M from Jeff Bezos," *KOTA TV* (November 26, 2020): https://www.kotatv.com/2020/11/26/ndn-collective-gets-awarded-12m-from-jeff-bezos/

44. Stephen A. Silver, "Jews Are Indigenous to Israel. They're Defending Their Homeland, Not 'Colonizing' It," *Los Angeles Times* (December 6, 2023): https://www.latimes.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/story/2023-12-06/jews-are-indigenous-to-israel-non-a-colonial-sta

45. Ryan Bellerose, "Are Jews Indigenous to the Land of Israel? Yes," *Tablet Magazine* (February 8, 2017): https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/bellerose-aboriginal-people

The most egregious false analogy, however, is the Left's attempt to draw parallels between Palestine and Ukraine.[46] Many American liberals treat Israel as analogous to Russia and cast Palestinians as equivalent to the Ukrainians. In this framework, Russia is seen as an occupying power and Ukraine as a heroic nation fighting for independence – just like the Palestinians.[47] This analysis is not only false but actively serves U.S. imperialism. NATO expansion into Ukraine was not a defensive project but an imperialist maneuver designed to create a Western foothold on Russia's border.[48] The 2014 U.S.-backed coup in Kyiv installed a puppet regime, and since then Washington has funneled billions in arms into Ukraine, including to openly fascist militias.[49] In this context, Russia cannot be equated with Israel; rather, it is a state resisting U.S. encirclement.[50] Moreover, Russia has consistently supported anti-imperialist struggles in the Middle East, defending the Syrian government against Western regime-change operations, aligned with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), signed joint agreements with China, backing Iran against U.S. sanctions, and affirming Palestinian self-determination.[51] For this reason, Russia plays a crucial role in the emerging multipolar order – standing as one of the few powerful states willing to confront U.S. hegemony directly. To collapse Russia into the same category as Israel is to parrot imperialist talking points and obscure the real nature of the global struggle.

In each of these three cases – racism, settler-colonialism, and Ukrainian nationalism – the American left builds up false arguments based on superficial analogies rather than serious materialist analysis. This serves only to dilute and distort the Palestinian cause. By reducing Palestine to a metaphor for liberal

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46. Ukraine Solidarity Network, "Stand Against Genocide and Imperialism, from Palestine to Ukraine," *Tempest* (February 22, 2024): https://tempestmag.org/2024/02/stand-against-genocide-and-imperialism-from-palestine-to-ukraine/

47. Nathan J. Robinson, "If You Support Ukrainian Resistance to Occupation, You Must Also Support Palestinian Resistance to Occupation," *Current Affairs* (July 5, 2023): https://www.currentaffairs.org/news/2023/07/if-you-support-ukrainian-resistance-to-occupation-you-must-also-support-palestinian-resistance-to-occupation

48. Ted Snider, "US Always Knew NATO Expansion Led to War," *Antiwar.com* (January 9, 2025): https://original.antiwar.com/ted_snider/2025/01/08/us-always-knew-nato-expansion-led-to-war/

49. Peter Schwarz, "Coup in Ukraine: A Warning to the International Working Class," *World Socialist Web Site* (February 25, 2014): https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/02/25/pers-f25.html

50. Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), "Russian Communists: Russia Is Fighting Neo-Nazism in Ukraine," *Midwestern Marx* (May 3, 2023): https://www.midwesternmarx.com/articles/russian-communists-russia-is-fighting-neo-nazism-in-ukraine-by-cprf

51. Niko Vorobyov, "What's Behind Russia's 'Soft Power' Moves on Israel-Palestine?" *Al Jazeera* (August 13, 2024): https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/13/whats-behind-russias-soft-power-moves-on-israel-palestine

social-justice discourse, the American left substitutes moralistic gestures for a serious anti-imperialist strategy. Worse, these analogies invite Zionists to co-opt the very language of resistance, portraying Israel as a victim of racism, a movement of "indigenous return," or a democratic bulwark against tyranny.

Palestine is not a talking point for intersectional activism. It is a frontline of the global war against imperialism.

The Missed Opportunity to Engage Conservatives

One of the most serious shortcomings of the Palestine solidarity movement in the United States is its refusal to engage with conservatives, particularly those within the populist right and MAGA base.[52] These groups express genuine anti-war sentiment and a growing disillusionment with foreign intervention, sentiments that could, under the right leadership, be redirected toward anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist positions. Many conservatives are already frustrated by the billions of taxpayer dollars sent to Israel each year, even as living standards decline and domestic infrastructure crumbles. For fiscal conservatives concerned about balanced budgets, U.S. aid to Israel can easily be reframed as an unnecessary burden imposed by an empire that prioritizes foreign entanglements over its own people.[53] Additionally, isolationist tendencies within the conservative movement, particularly among libertarians, present another avenue for engagement. These groups often advocate for an "America First" foreign policy that prioritizes disengagement from international conflicts and minimizes foreign entanglements.[54] U.S. support for Israel, tied to the broader framework of interventionist policies, is increasingly seen by this faction as counterproductive and misaligned with national interests.[55]

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52. Jonathan Brown, "The Nonsense of MAGA Communism: A Response," *Midwestern Marx* (April 23, 2025): https://www.midwesternmarx.com/articles/the-nonsense-of-maga-communism-a-response-by-jonathan-brown

53. Edward Liger Smith, "In Defense of the MAGA Communism Strategy," *Midwestern Marx* (May 27, 2024): https://www.midwesternmarx.com/articles/in-defense-of-the-maga-communism-strategy-by-edward-liger-smith

54. Meg Kinnard, "Trump's Decision to Strike Iran May Draw More Criticism from MAGA Anti-Interventionists," *PBS NewsHour* (June 21, 2025): https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trumps-decision-to-strike-iran-may-draw-more-criticism-from-maga-anti-interventionists

55. Tom Wrobleski, " 'You Broke Your Promise': MAGA in a Rage After Trump Turns His Back on Core Belief," *Staten Island Advance* (August 24, 2025): https://www.silive.com/politics/2025/08/you-broke-your-promise-maga-in-a-rage-after-trump-turns-his-back-on-core-belief.html

There are also moral and religious avenues for engagement. Conservative Christians, who often speak of defending persecuted Christians abroad, could be moved by the plight of Palestinian Christians living under occupation.[56] Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ, today exists under Israeli military control, with checkpoints, land confiscations, and restrictions on worship.[57] In Gaza, Israeli bombs have destroyed churches and other Christian sites, adding to the suffering of an already besieged population.[58] That the Holy Land of Christianity is today a site of brutal repression is a fact that could resonate powerfully with conservative Christians, yet it remains largely ignored by the Palestine solidarity movement. By refusing to foreground these stories, activists forfeit a potential bridge to one of Israel's most important bases of support within the United States.

Instead of pursuing these openings, much of the American left demonizes conservatives wholesale as "fascists" or "white supremacists."[59] This sectarian approach not only prevents the emergence of a broad working-class front against U.S. imperialism, but also drives alienated conservatives into the arms of genuine neo-fascist movements. Without being exposed to a Marxist critique of Zionism, many will instead turn to dangerous rhetoric that scapegoats Jews, reproducing the very antisemitism that strengthens Zionist propaganda. By rejecting dialogue with conservatives, the left effectively hands the field to the far-right, squandering an opportunity to weaken the bipartisan consensus that sustains Israel.

To succeed, the Palestine solidarity movement must abandon its fixation on ideological purity and embrace coalition-building across political lines. This does not mean compromising on principle, but rather recognizing that anti-imperialist struggle requires the broadest possible unity of the working-class, including those who are socially conservative. Refusing to engage them narrows the movement to a liberal subculture, confined to permanent marginality. The task is to show how U.S. support for Israel is not simply a partisan cultural issue but a class question – one that drains the wealth

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56. Tucker Carlson, "Here's What It's Really Like to Live as a Christian in the Holy Land," *YouTube* (August 11, 2025): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y79CfG2R_3g

57. Dalia Hatuqa, " 'We Are Living in a Touristic Prison': Palestinians on Life in the Holy City of Bethlehem," *Vox* (December 23, 2019): https://www.vox.com/world/2019/12/23/21024634/bethlehem-tourism-christmas-west-bank-palestine-israel-settlements

58. Associated Press, "Israel Strikes Gaza Church, Killing 3 and Wounding Priest Who Was Close to Late Pope," *NPR* (July 17, 2025): https://www.npr.org/2025/07/17/nx-s1-5471391/israel-hamas-war-gaza-catholic-church-priest

59. Ben Lorber, "The Right's Anti-Israel Insurgents," *Jewish Currents* (May 15, 2024): https://jewishcurrents.org/the-rights-anti-israel-insurgents

of working people at home, entrenches the war machine abroad, and obstructs the possibility of peace for Palestinians. Only by forging this broader unity can the movement hope to seriously challenge U.S. imperialism and dismantle Zionism.

Conclusion: Toward a Working-Class Anti-Imperialist Strategy

The Palestine question is not a matter of culture wars or identity politics. It is, at its core, a question of imperialism. So long as the U.S. maintains Israel as its outpost in the Middle East, Palestinians will remain oppressed and American workers will continue to pay the price in blood and treasure. True solidarity requires a strategy rooted not in liberal moralism but in revolutionary class struggle. It requires proletarian unity across partisan divides, placing Palestine squarely within the broader fight against U.S. monopoly capitalism and empire.

If the Palestine movement in the United States continues to tie itself to the failed strategies of political polarization and culture wars, it will remain marginalized and ineffective. The ruling elite – Democrat and Republican alike – thrive on division, keeping the working-class distracted with endless cultural battles while imperialism marches on unchecked. The “distancing hypothesis” embraced by liberals only reinforces this logic, miscasting Palestine as a boutique issue of progressive identity rather than a central battlefield of anti-imperialist struggle. To break this cycle, the movement must reject liberal frameworks and develop a positive, class-based critique of U.S. imperialism.

A socialist strategy must therefore be uncompromising: cutting all financial, military, and diplomatic support for Israel; supporting de-Zionification as part of the global anti-imperialist struggle; and rooting solidarity in the material interests of American workers. Every dollar sent to subsidize Israel’s apartheid regime is a dollar stolen from healthcare, housing, education, and infrastructure in the U.S. Every bomb dropped on Gaza is another reminder that imperialism abroad and austerity at home are two sides of the same coin. By making these connections clear, the pro-Palestine movement can demonstrate that liberation for Palestine and dignity for American workers are part of the same struggle.

This perspective also demands recognizing the global shift toward multipolarity as a historic advance towards socialism. The decline of unipolar American

dominance opens the door for nations such as China, Russia, Iran, and others to resist imperialism and support oppressed peoples. The axis of resistance in the Middle East, backed in part by Russia and China, has already proven decisive in confronting U.S. and Israeli aggression. Supporting this emerging multipolar world is not only strategically necessary but an essential condition for Palestinian liberation.

Ultimately, the task before us is to build a broader working-class movement against imperialism – one that transcends the narrow confines of liberal politics and speaks to the shared material interests of workers across the U.S. Such a movement must reject sectarianism, engage both liberals and conservatives, and unite the proletariat around the struggle against empire. Palestine will not be freed by campus activism or culture wars. It will be freed through revolutionary class struggle, waged both abroad and at home.

The ACP must take the lead in articulating this strategy. Only the ACP can consistently link the liberation of Palestine to the emancipation of the American working-class, showing that the fight against Zionism is inseparable from the fight against U.S. imperialism. By doing so, the ACP can unite workers against the empire, weaken the foundations of U.S. hegemony, and help usher in the multipolar, socialist future in which Palestine will at last be free.

5

The Recovery of Marxist Economics: An Interview with Oscar Rojas

Oscar Rojas[1]

RA: *All things geopolitically seem to point toward multipolarity coming into being, and U.S. unipolarity losing its power. However, we have seen for more than two years a genocide of the Palestinians televised in front of all of our screens. Most of humanity stands with Palestine and is disgusted by the genocidal crimes of the Zionist entity. Even bourgeois global institutions have condemned the genocide. And yet, not much has concretely been done - with few brave exceptions - to bring it to a halt. How does the situation in Palestine for us to think about where we are at in this global transition to multipolarity?*

OR: It seems to me that the genocide in Palestine allows us to observe a duality that can only be understood through historical materialism. On the one hand, it is clear that Palestine lays bare the true nature of capitalist expansion, especially during its financial phase, in which all human content is emptied out to make way for the absolute expression of the fetish of exchange value:

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1. Dr. Oscar D. Rojas Silva is a Professor of Political Economy at FES-Acatlán UNAM.

interest-bearing capital. As Marx pointed out, there are two civilizational objectives of the capitalist system: (a) to constitute the world market, and (b) to constitute the global credit system. It seems to me that globalization, proclaimed immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall, is the symbol that these objectives were achieved. Nevertheless, as dialectical laws indicate, as soon as an organism completes the cycle of its maturation phase, it immediately turns into the crisis that opens the way for the qualitative leap of the next organism. That is to say, the unipolarity momentarily achieved in 1989 simultaneously became the dissolution of that very same unipolarity. The cycle of the creation of the multipolar world as we now know it in fact begins with the fall of the first brick of the Wall.

During the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century we observed an apotheotic display of the "end of history." The ideological defense system of capitalism frenetically pushed a postmodern epistemology that managed to deactivate the vision of permanent movement through the disarticulation of the notion of the "concrete totality." This induced the international community into an inability to connect the sphere of the economy with the sphere of politics, or in other words, to connect the discussion of the Market with that of the State. Marxist crisis theory, in fact, was totally forgotten until reality itself, through the force of the continuing validity of the law of value, erupted in 2008 with the subprime crisis. This symbolizes that the hegemonic power of the United States meant a financialization that is, at the same time, a process of relative deindustrialization. This became the material origin for the new industrial capacity of the subordinated countries, which in this way acquired their relative emancipation, that is, the mechanism of the BRICS. In other words, in fully materialist terms, the multipolar world is not an alternative to unipolarity, but its immediate dialectical consequence. In other words, what Marx pointed to as the process of existing the capitalist system is verified: the restitution of individual and social property to give rise to entities not subordinated but coordinated under the principle of the Freely Associated Producers (FAP).

On the other hand, we must remember that systems of domination require active systems of justification to contain the natural rebellion against oppression. Let us recall that the Second World War also gave rise to the process of emancipation against neocolonialism, which was even expressed in the UN in 1974 with the acceptance of the so-called New International Economic Order (NIEO), whose central point was the sovereignty of countries over the movement of capital. The Global South has remained in resistance ever since, but the postmodern component managed to deactivate the critical

articulation of the universities, and this gave free rein for the media to construct an interpretive version of reality as if capitalism were in fact an immovable and eternal phase of the global economy. That is to say, historicity and materiality were deactivated, creating a kind of market obscurantism that has inhibited the unification of positions on the left. In this sense, Carlos Garrido's proposal of the fetishism of purity is essential, since it describes this phenomenon with great precision. This explains why, despite the fact that we all agree on the intolerability of the dehumanization in Palestine, it seems as if we cannot do anything. The ideological system of capitalism succeeded in concealing the web of state and market relations that must be transformed in order to reconfigure geo-economic and geopolitical relations.

In other words, the ideological system conceals the current logical phase in which we already find ourselves materially at the threshold of access to the Freely Associated Producers (FAP). But insofar as we remain without the vision of the concrete totality and remain unconvinced that multipolarity is not a process yet to come but one that has been here in potential for a couple of decades already, we will not be able to begin to foster mechanisms of solidarity—not only with Palestine, but with one another. That is to say, the rehumanization of economic relations under the principles of solidarity and internationalism is deepening an international community that abandons the precepts of Anglo-Saxon globalization. This explains why we all watch the genocide with a sense of powerlessness, but what we fail to see is the intimate connection between my own liberation and the liberation of the other. What is needed is not only the recovery of the concrete totality but also the recognition that such concreteness is communal: your destiny is my destiny. It is necessary to push forward a global cultural revolution in order to understand that this horror is not occurring in a geographically determined space but is instead an expression of the global body.

It seems to me that Israel also represents a very curious phenomenon of the prolongation of old neocolonialism. Taking into account Immanuel Wallerstein's theory of hegemonic centers, we can observe how the center of power shifted from the Indo-Chinese region to Europe and later to America, but when it positioned itself in the United States, the pretensions of unipolarity obliged it to maintain extra-continental positions. The next strategic space and summit, then, is the control of the Middle East, which is why Israel symbolizes the artificial creation of a State in order to achieve these objectives. In other words, it has been an attempt to redirect the process of state succession in order

to preserve the strength of global social capital controlled by financial imperialism.

However, what we have observed is that the United States and Israel have not been able to consolidate this power. In fact, it is already impossible, due to the solid presence of Russia and China as ultimate poles that deter expansionist intentions. But I insist: these intentions are no longer materially possible. All the time that the United States and Israel continue trying to achieve their objectives is historically wasted time. This is where genocide takes on another meaning: it is not an open wound but rather a painful dilation through which another vision of the human must be born.

The same horror with which we observe this violence is not because the system of power has become debased. Since the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, a permanent period of terror was inaugurated. What has changed is that there already exists—even if we are not entirely conscious of it—the possibility of higher social relations of coordination. The power of the United States–Israel is already anachronistic, and this is why it becomes impossible for them to increase their sympathies. On the contrary, even the old media powers of defense have not been able to conceal the anachronism of capitalist dehumanization.

RA: *Morena and the fourth transformation has been one of the most exciting developments in the western hemisphere. How do you understand the new phase of this revolutionary process marked by the new Sheinbaum administration?*

OR: It seems to me that in this new context of the Freely Associated Producers (FAP), countries are beginning to seek a return to historical human contents. Mexico is in a special position because it has been in a dialectical interrelationship with the United States, being affected by the general hegemonic cycle. It is necessary to remember that Mexico, at the beginning of the 20th century, carried out a social revolution with its own approach but in accordance with the energy of that time, during which the Soviet Revolution also unfolded. This gave rise to the formation of a social state that was experienced strongly under Cardenismo and the subsequent period of accelerated industrialization that we lived through during what is known as the “Mexican Miracle” (1939–1970).

But this very process was altered by the consolidation of U.S. hegemony from the Bretton Woods agreements in 1944. Since then, even with the heroic

resistance of workers' and students' movements such as those of 1968–1971, and the later "globalphobic" and anti-NAFTA resistances, a tradition of struggle has been constituted—one that mutated from urban and rural guerrilla movements to the electoral path. This process gave birth to Obradorismo at the beginning of the 21st century, which, although belated compared to the waves of leftism in Latin America, arrived with force and determination.

Since 2018, a process of structured resistance has begun through the recovery of the general conditions of production and the conditions of reproduction of society. It is no minor detail that Mexico has been able to transition forcefully from the 2018–2024 six-year term of Andrés Manuel López Obrador to the 2024–2030 term of Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo with the highest levels of approval. What has been achieved is what figures such as Salvador Allende once dreamed of under the concept of democratic socialism. Just as the first Mexican Miracle of the 20th century was diluted under the rise of U.S. hegemony, today there exists the potential for a new process that could achieve the truncated objectives, especially because we are now living through the decline of U.S. hegemony.

I find it important to point out that this process has begun to reconvert the state structure, erasing the powers that had sustained neoliberalism. Today, the three powers that compose the Mexican State—the executive, the legislative, and recently the judicial—are on the path to democratization. The latter is of great relevance, since it had been the power that guaranteed foreign capital the ability to secure its conditions at the expense of national plans. From my point of view, the recovery of the judiciary through democratic election by the people consolidates the feasibility of continuing the transformation process for many more years. The electoral insurgency of 2018 became a state insurgency in 2025. Moreover, all of this is occurring within the framework of the so-called Mexico Plan, which is a process of reindustrialization, following in China's footsteps, in terms of seeking technology transfer and the conscious control of transnational capital within a national framework.

In addition, this entire revolution has as its foundation the recovery of history. That is why the Fourth Transformation (4T) cannot be understood without reference to the Third Transformation (3T), the Mexican Revolution; the Second Transformation (2T), the separation of church power from civil power; and the First Transformation (1T), independence from the Spanish crown. And what I call the Great Transformation (GT), which recovers the strength of the indigenous peoples whose civilization, which had already been able to

consolidate a state with a developed communal structure, was interrupted by the arrival of the Spaniards. For this reason, the mystique of the 4T is very powerful, because it not only reclaims the role of resistance against colonialism and neocolonialism but also recovers the root of the communal on a large scale—an essential ingredient for multipolarity. Mexico, although not formally part of the BRICS, is already a BRICS-type country in its own right.

RA: *We have previously discussed how Mexican humanism, in a certain sense, is a homologous to our efforts to develop an American Marxism. Can you elaborate on how Mexican humanism accomplishes this?*

OR: Mexican Humanism was articulated by Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2022 as the result of reflection on the experience of the movement of transformation once it became government. It is the recovery of the insurgent social root and of the ancestral root of the Original Communal State (ECO) that existed prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. In a certain way, this process of reflection is a containment of the capitalist ideological system through the recovery of the human content within its historical development. In this sense, people recover their specific contents. Just as China speaks of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," reminding us that there are no revolutions in the abstract but that they are always anchored in their historical material contents, so too American Marxism and Mexican Humanism are companions in struggle, as they both seek to constitute, from their particularities, new interconnections that contribute to multipolarity.

This connection is very important because, as we said, Mexico and the United States have been in a critical symbiosis, but a symbiosis nonetheless, and therefore internationalism has great conditions for developing due to this union. As Walter Benjamin said, it is our task to recover history "against the grain" in order to re-signify our shared contents as well. It is no minor detail that the search for alternatives is also necessary, since both in the U.S. and in Mexico the labels "Marxism" or "Communism" continue to carry a halo of distrust among the population at large, thanks to the power of the corporate media. For this reason, it is necessary to act with creativity and compel ourselves to create new attractive forms for the new revolution already underway.

RA: *There's been much talk about a Russia-Cuba-Mexico corridor. Can you tell us a bit about it? How do you think it could integrate Mexico greater into the multipolar world? Do you think it could help stimulate Cuba's economy -*

currently struggling under one of its most difficult periods thanks to the blockade?

OR: As I pointed out in the first question regarding Palestine, blockades can be seen as genocides in slow motion. They are the expression of the same mechanism, sustained moreover by the same and increasingly unsustainable unilateral veto power in the United Nations (UN). Cuba radiated enormous revolutionary energy for Latin America and the world (let us not forget, for example, how Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso was called the "African Ché"), and today it too finds itself in a critical phase for the same reason: the historical shift toward multilateralism. I believe that it is now necessary to initiate a new process of liberation under the same principle of mutuality: your destiny is mine. Therefore, for the restructuring toward multipolarity—even for the survival of the United States itself, now as a regional hegemon—it is necessary to emphasize the lifting of the blockade. I think we must mark this as a gateway to also dissolving the low-intensity blockade that the U.S. maintains over Latin America under the Monroe Doctrine.

Part of the framework of multipolarity is the possibility of multiple and simultaneous relations among peoples. For this reason, the corridor outlined by Russia–Cuba–Mexico would be one more line of this multipolarity. These would not be exclusive relationships, as under U.S. hegemony, but rather open and diverse ones. However, in the first phase, it is necessary to advance the multipolar principle in order to nullify the effects of sanctions. Just as Iran was recently able to withstand a U.S. attack thanks to the support of the BRICS bloc, it is necessary that Cuba receive that same support, so that the potential of its humanist, internationalist, and universalist revolution—still alive at the very core of its resistance—can fully express itself. We must make memory of that revolution in order to nourish the model of the Freely Associated Producers (FAP).

RA: *As a Marxist economist, what do you consider to be the relevance of Marx's worldview and political economy for understanding our present day?*

OR: I believe the relevance of Marx is essential precisely because it concerns the scientific recovery of the laws of development of the capitalist system. In my view, the recovery of the law of value is fundamental because it allows us to move beyond speculation about the future and, instead, to understand not only what big capital seeks but above all its limits. Moreover, the 20th century fostered a philosophical version of Marxism—undoubtedly fundamental—but

one that necessarily must be accompanied by Marxist economics. It is true that at one point there were elements that led to “economism,” but instead of recovering its dimension, it seems it was erased from discussion.

I also believe that the recovery of the dialectical laws is fundamental. Postmodern social science deactivated all logic of movement and reduced it to the formal logic of non-contradiction, which has inhibited the possibility of observing the dynamic trajectory of historical phases. Therefore, the recovery of Marxist economics is essential in order to sustain the new strategies of industrialization necessary to build the relative strength required to reach the multipolar world, or the stage of the Freely Associated Producers (FAP).

Economics programs in the region and the world are called to be profoundly renewed, especially after the marginalist counterrevolution that denied the law of the value of social labor. This renewal will be nourished, in the first phase, by Marxist economics. The goal is to carry out an integral analysis of the three volumes of Capital as the core, not only for critiquing the social system but also for examining its intimate dialectical relationship with the natural system. From this perspective, the recovery of Marxist economics is essential for the reconstitution of the multipolar world.

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